

# DOCTOR WHO

MORE SHORT TRIPS

POLICE "PALL" BOX

A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY STEPHEN COLE

BBC

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Here on Earth or out in the depths of the cosmos, the Doctor and his companions are never far from adventure. *More Short Trips* – the cleverly-titled follow-up to the popular *Short Trips* volume of short stories – takes the time travellers on another careering course of exciting escapades throughout time and space.

Showcasing the talents of both established authors and first-time writers, *More Short Trips* features every TV Doctor and a whole host of companions – plus a few surprises...

Discover things on Earth you were never meant to know.  
Get around the universe. Get short tripping.

*Edited by Stephen Cole, this collection features stories by Peter Anghelides, Ian Atkins, Christopher Bulis, Paul Farnsworth, Simon Forward, Paul Leonard, Jason Loborik, Steve Lyons, Paul Magrs, David A. McIntee, Andrew Miller, Robert Perry & Mike Tucker, Gareth Roberts, Gary Russell, Tara Samms and Dave Stone.*

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# DOCTOR WHO

**BBC**

MORE SHORT TRIPS

STEPHEN COLE

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*for Pig*

*and for Fiddly Mouse and the Leisure Dragon*

# Introduction

When putting together this second anthology of *Doctor Who* fiction,

I found myself questioning the very quintessence of the short story.

' *Short*,' I thought to myself. ' *Story*. .' At last, it came to me. I finally had

that elusive theme I had longed for to tie the collection together. *More*

*Short Trips* would be full of *even more stories* of differing degrees of

shortness. The marketing department was thrilled, and the concept was

so ground-breaking, I was able to assemble a fantastic bunch of talent.

Go on, look at the names on the back cover again. It's not a bad line

up, is it?

Ho-hum. This introduction seems like I feel, somewhat tired and

hysterical. Well, it's November 1998, and on the 23rd - that illustrious

date - I pass on the baton of full-time *Doctor Who* editor not simply to a

successor but to a relay team's worth of people working on different

aspects of the whole. Somewhat vaingloriously I'm reminded of Frazer

Hines and Wendy Padbury recalling how they couldn't stop mucking

around and being emotional during *The War Games*, once they knew the

end was in sight. However, they, of course, were professionals doing a

job (albeit one they clearly enjoyed), and I still feel like a child playing

in a sweet shop from time to time, even after two years in the role of

editor. This has always been more than just a job. It's been two or three

jobs! No, no, no, as Ronnie Corbett might say. No, that's not what I

really mean at all.

I've been asked a few times what I think the magic of *Doctor Who* to

be. When I began in this job, I had a shiny, sparkling answer, carefully

rehearsed (I'd probably cribbed it from Gary Gillatt, but it was still

quite a good answer). As the months muddled by I lost track of it a bit

- began to bluster more, had to grope around for my perspective on the

programme. Sometimes I couldn't recall the answer at all, when things

got very difficult, and only wise words from others over the years could

soothe. ' *Doctor Who* is the only prison where time is added on for good

behaviour.' 'The BBC is just somewhere we go during the day.' 'Do the

best you can, then go out and buy yourself something nice with the

money'. .

Eventually, I thought perhaps there *was* no magic of *Doctor Who*,

only tricks. But just when I feared cynicism at last held me firmly in its

languid grip, I realised: it's still a bloody good trick that continues to

entertain and occupy such a large and passionate audience, that lingers



in the memory for years after it was last performed. And in the end,

who needs to understand how the trick works? It stops being magic at

all, then, doesn't it?

Skip over this paragraph if you like, I'm going to have to say a few

thank yous: to Lucy Campbell, first and foremost; to Mike Tucker for

friendship and beers; to Gary Gillatt for being an acceptable face; to

Dave Owen for his Jimmy Saville impersonation; to Paul Simpson for

his helpful comments and input; to Gary Russell, Alan Barnes and Sue

Cowley for their reassuring presence; to Peter, Jon, Justin and too many

other authors to name here for their enthusiasm and support, especially

those who gave up their time for *Attack of the Mongos*; to Terrance Dicks

and Chris Boucher for getting me hooked in the first place; to Steve

Roberts and the Restoration Team for a job well done and an ambition

achieved; to Lesley Levene for unswerving loyalty and support and to

Jac Rayner for invaluable assistance, and for helping me invade the

planet Ronnos. Oh, and not really a thank you, but a single word to the

swankily reinvented Rebecca Levene. . *Zygon!*

By the time you're reading this I'll have been gone for months,

sitting beneath different fluorescent lights in a different office, helping

to orchestrate other fictional worlds and recalling my time on *Doctor*

*Who* as the most ridiculous, frustrating and engaging period of my life.

Steve Cole

November 1998

MORE SHORT TRIPS

Totem

by Tara Samm

'Lovely eggs, Señora Panstedas, really, really lovely eggs!'  
He wolfed

down his breakfast, blue eyes shining at her. The morning was barely

breaking through the shutters on the windows by the time  
his meal was

finished, a rough hunk of bread mopping up any last  
remnants.

' *Beautiful* eggs.'

She half smiled at the compliment, although she'd heard the  
same

words every morning these last few months. John was a good  
man.

Quiet, strange, but undoubtedly good.

Señora Panstedas's husband had disappeared, believed  
dead, two

years ago; then her son had got sick and died. She'd spent  
six days in

darkness. The heat from the range in her rough stone  
farmhouse

kitchen barely lasted a day, and Señora Panstedas had sat  
motionless in

the cold silence. Until John arrived.

'I want to work,' he had said.

She'd stared at him, a tall handsome man who would have  
seemed

young and in the prime of life if not for the eyes - grey-blue,  
empty

eyes, sadder than her own. She had simply stared. He had been

knocking on her door for what seemed like a day.

'I want to work.' Silence. 'Someone in the village told me perhaps

you would be hiring.'

She had screamed at him, shouted abuse, pushed him off her

doorstep. She had cursed the village, cursed him, longing to curse God

but not quite finding the words. He had stood unflinching, eyes looking

into hers, at first blankly and then with some measure of comprehension.

'I'll just wait over here, shall I?'

She'd shouted some more, then shut herself back into the darkness

of the kitchen. But it had nagged at her, kindled life from her despair,

this strange man on her doorstep.

His hair was long, brown and wavy, and his skin was pale - a foreigner? His accent was unfamiliar, though each word was carefully

pronounced. Then, as now, he'd been wearing a coat of green velvet, a

simple white shirt, grey trousers that looked to be of good quality, and

brown leather shoes. She'd thought of him all day, until the sun had

begun to set, thought of her husband, thought of God. She knew there

was more than the dark in the shuttered room but she was fuming,

reluctant to admit it to this strange young man who clearly already

knew.

Could he still be there? Cautiously, she'd moved to the window and

opened a creaking shutter, and gaped. There he was, talking to the

chickens pecking around the yard, pulling wildly at weeds from the edge

of her field, slinging them over his shoulder into an impossibly neat and

ordered pile. Then she'd got angry. How dare he. .

When she stormed to the door and flung it open, he'd been leaning

on a rake, looking at her very seriously and speaking very fast. 'I know

this is presumptuous of me but there's so much to do here and the

sooner we start -'

The egg had hit him on the head. He'd stood in front of the

bloodied fat orange of the setting sun, his gaze yo-yoing between her

eyes and her hand. His finger had whipped up to his forehead and she'd

flinched at the sudden movement. But all he did was push a straggling

curl of hair away from the sticky trickle of yolk dripping past his eye.

'One egg a day, though preferably two if you can spare them, will

suffice as payment for my services. I would prefer to take them orally,

once you've cooked them in some way, but I can do that myself if it's a

problem for you.'

She'd stared at him open-mouthed, struck by the quiet sincerity in

his voice. But the man was smiling now, and so was she, and then she

was laughing as much as he was as a warm night began to nestle over

the crude stone farmhouse.

She thought of John now far more than she ever thought of her

husband and son. It seemed to her that he had come, in some way, to

play both roles now; she really felt that. During the days they worked;

sometimes together, but usually he would go out alone, digging in the

fields or reclaiming land lost to weeds and neglect. He would even go

to the market in Funchal for her with sugar beet or some of their

chickens, and come back laughing with a little money or some scabbard

fish encrusted in salt. He would spin the coins on the table, having

carefully opened the shutters just a little to let in a small shaft of

sunshine, a tiny spotlight for their escudos to dance in. When the show

was over she would take each coin and press it to her heart. He smiled

to see her do this, a smile that shone brighter than the coins  
in their

dance.

Five months now. John would often go for long walks when  
he'd

finished work. He seemed to have boundless energy, and  
she admired

him and envied him for it in equal measure. Some nights  
after dinner

they would sit out in the yard and look at the moon.

'It's so bleak,' she had once said. 'It looks like a piece of old  
bone.'

He had turned to her and smiled sadly. 'We must remember,  
Señora

Panstedas, nothing is ever as bleak as first it seems.' And he  
had gently

squeezed her hand.

Ever since she had always thought of John and the moon  
together.

She knew she must not covet him. He had arrived in her life  
when

she felt that she was worth nothing at all and had made her  
remarkable.

She no longer wore black. The first morning of colour she  
had been up



all night, at first with excitement at what she might wear,  
then with fear

at what John's reaction might be. Disgust, perhaps, that she  
could so

soon abandon her mourning. Or perhaps he would see her in  
a new

light. Could he think of her as woman and not just widow?  
Perhaps he

would think her too old for the outfit, find her appearance  
improper.

No, never that. Somehow she knew that age had no  
meaning for

John.

As she'd prepared breakfast that day she had trembled,  
fighting the

desire to rush back to her room and revert to her simple,  
unflattering

black smock. She was stupid, she'd insisted to herself,  
stupid and old

and silly even to be wanting to do this. Then the door rattled  
open,

creaking on its huge hinges. She'd dropped the eggs in  
surprise as John

had barged in. He must have been up and out hours before.

'Look!' he'd said with a smile, making the word last for seconds as

he held out his hand. Stunned, she'd found herself focusing on a small

purple flower.

'First one of spring!' he'd beamed. 'I know its name, I think, but I

can't remember since. .' He frowned, then laughed. 'I don't *want* to

remember!' He'd tucked the flower into her buttonhole, then spun

around and slipped into his chair at the table. She'd waited for some

reaction to her appearance, holding her breath, but John had remained

silent until, suddenly, he'd bounded back up to his feet. 'I don't want to

remember anything. Not even how hungry I am. No eggs today, please,

Señora Panstedas!' And with that, he had vanished through the door,

leaving her wincing as he'd slammed it shut behind him.

So she'd found herself mindlessly tidying the house, choking back

tears as she moved from room to room. Ending up in his.

The sun had been low and orange in the sky through John's window.

She'd sat on his bed and realised he must have slept on the floor, if

anywhere at all, last night - the sheets were untouched. She'd noticed a

chewed pencil on the bedside table and a piece of paper covered in

sprawling handwriting. She'd traced a finger over the ornate swirls of

the words as she'd read:

*I feel now I am a totem pole, and my selves are dancing al  
around me. Or*

*I am a maypole, and as they dance, the ribbons they hold  
stretch and twist*

*and fray. One is tugging harder than most. Harder and  
harder.*

There had been other pieces of writing on other pieces of paper, but

she couldn't read them. She'd brooded over the words, suddenly feeling

much calmer. 'My selves. .' She'd thought of the people inside her -

wife, widow, mother, worker, victim - all dancing round the woman she

was. John had brought her into focus.

So she had continued to wear the brighter clothes, and one evening

John had looked very hard at her after the day's work. When he'd

spoken, his voice had been quiet and urgent.

'It seems to me sometimes that I have spent half my life living and

the other half waiting, watching. .Half hoping there'd be. .resolution.'

She had looked at him the way she often did, with something

between a bemused smile and a mildly disapproving frown on her face.

'Keep wearing colour, Señora Panstedas.'

And she had broken down in tears and smiles, and he'd looked

uncertainly at her, concerned, and then rushed out to pick another

purple flower for her. That night he had made her dinner.

Spring had become summer. Today the sun sat swollen in a sky that

seemed more blue than any she could remember, the first blue sky for

decades. She went outside into the yard, listened to the crickets and the

birds, and wanted to walk. To Machico perhaps, or even to Funchal.

Anywhere.

She soon tired of the dirt track leading to town and decided instead

to wander through the fields. She paused to gaze at Pico de Facho, its

greens and browns enriched in the gold of the sunlight, and then she

heard voices.

Of course. John had told her he was clearing the levada of debris

from a landslide brought on by the last storm, somewhere round here.

Hard, exhausting work, and these last few days he had seemed quieter,

withdrawn. She'd heard him pacing his room so many nights, had

agonised again and again over whether or not to go into his room and

see if he was all right. But at breakfast he had praised her eggs as ever,

taken the splintering shovel and pickaxe from the yard and walked off

determinedly. She had watched him vanish from sight and now had

found him again. But who was he with? The outcrop she was standing

on was directly above him. She could see nothing, but she could hear

the voices - first John's plaintive tones and then a softer voice, low, dry,

tinged with another accent she didn't recognise.

' .. this is not an exile!'

'It's futile. A waste.'

'No labour is wasted if it enables progress to be made.'  
John's voice

was punctuated by the scrape of the shovel against rock and mud,

lifting, heaving, dropping again. His short gasps of exertion were

steamrolled over by the commanding voice of the other man.

'Calluses won't hide the blood on your hands. Let others do the

work for you.'

'Why? Why, when I should be doing it myself?'

'You are the champion of -'

'I am the *Doctor*. '

His voice carried strongly through the warm air. She imagined it

could carry all the way to Funchal. Then the other man spoke again.

'You can't just -'

'I am the Doctor. No other.'

She lay flat on her front now, holding rough scrub in one hand, a

clump of daisies in the other, tears sliding down her face and dropping

to the fragrant grass below. She rocked her head with closed eyes, not

understanding why the anger, the outrage, in John's voice hurt her so

much. He was a doctor. So was she his charge? Was that what all this

was about?

'You can't shirk your responsibilities.'

This other man's voice scared her, made her think of her son, her

husband, the life she had trudged through.

'I will face them,' John said. 'On my terms.'

'You think you know best?'

'I think it's better not to know at all. Only to hope.'

She scrambled up and stumbled away. Hoping. More words, fiercer

ones, floated up from below the ridge, but the sound of the shovel as it

scraped into the ground began to cut them up.

'You can't mine me out!'

'But I can keep digging. .'

She could hear the sound of the shovel long after the sound of the

words had faded.

The moon had joined the sun in the late afternoon sky. When John

returned, he was solemn, cowed even, but she felt a new vibrancy

about him, an energy, almost like the tingle from the electric generators

they were beginning to introduce to the island.

He sighed deeply and held out a clenched fist, slowly unfolding the



fingers to reveal a tarnished silver ring in the middle of his palm. She

gasped and held her hand to her mouth. John's eyes were wide and his

face grim, but his tone seemed almost light. 'Your husband's?'

She nodded, transfixed by the treasure in his hand.

'I found him out by the levada. Someone must've buried him in the

hillside. His body was washed down when the earth crumbled in the

storm.'

Now she stared at him. She met his eyes as his words continued to

come, soft and measured.

'There's a crack in his skull. I think he was murdered.' He paused.

'I'm so very sorry.'

She moved a hand numbly to the red shawl around her black dress

and pulled it away. She fingered the soft material. 'I should see him. For

myself.'

He nodded. 'Yes. Yes, you should. And then I'll tell the police.'

She wanted to scream, shout, strike him. 'Why did you have to. .

How could you. .?' she began, but he was distracted by the door

creaking in the slight breeze.

'I'm sorry?' he asked, benign but distant, a sad sympathetic smile

playing on his lips.

'You dug too deep.' She shook her head as if to stop tears from

reaching her eyes. 'You dig too deep, you find secrets.' She almost spat

the last words, she couldn't stop herself.

'Perhaps, Señora Panstedas,' John said quietly. 'I'll stop digging, for

now. And we can bury our dead.'

He stayed for her husband's funeral but she knew he would soon be

leaving. He wasn't the same; he seemed like a caged animal, a cooped-

up bird. She felt uncomfortable now to be in the same room as him, it

was as if his mind was fidgeting and his body was unsure how to

express it.

She pictured him as he'd been when the priest had intoned the last

rites for her husband, eyes darting all around the tiny graveyard,

lingering briefly here and there as if cataloguing every flower among the

stones and crosses, filing the information, discarding it, looking for

something else, something perhaps just out of view. Now in the room,

in the cool, rough kitchen in the early morning, she had closure and he

had his two eggs as usual.

When she came back from visiting the priest, to thank him once

again for the dignified service, there was a flower lying on the table in a

chink of white sunlight and a pile of coins. There was a letter too,

unsigned but full of warmth and charm; it touched her as their

conversations had.

Señora Panstedas died a few years later, never learning the truth about

her husband's last moments. The Doctor thought of her, sometimes.

Scientific Adviser

by Ian Atkins

The rising-falling noise groaned out across a London still half asleep.

It was the only noise.

Even the manhole cover, smashed into the air by a metal fist, went

tumbling soundlessly down the nearby steps.

Something drew itself up from the opened tunnel, sliding into the

daylight like an insect from rotten wood. A powerful silver body shone

bright in the sun. Then a second figure clawed its way into the world.

Another manhole cover flew into the air. Then another.

Eight of the creatures took up position at the top of the steps. Their

features were cast into metal masks, teardrop indentations denoting

eyes, black slits functioning as mouths.

The eight moved as one, their metal legs striding forward with

powerful momentum. Weapons were shifted into position. The leading

figure reached the steps. A silver foot swung downwards -  
- And missed the step, twisting.

'Whoahhhh - help!'

The giant overbalanced and bumped down on its rear. A handle

detached from the side of its head. One of the figure's shining

colleagues snorted with laughter, while others looked blindly around.

'Cut! Cut, you idiots!'

Lloyd Kingsley-Sayle hurried up to the fallen figure from where he'd

been watching the monitors.

'Daniel! What is *wrong* with you?'

'I said these eye holes were useless!'

Lloyd turned on the cast and crew around him.

'Someone get this. .this *idiot*. .patched up. Quickly, people!  
You

know we're behind schedule! And will someone stop the generator

making that damned noise!'

Lloyd stomped back to his canvas-backed chair. He sat.

'Excuse me, are you the . "producer". . here?'

He looked at the stranger who stood fidgeting over him.

'What does

it say on the chair, friend?'

The newcomer reached behind Lloyd. There was the sound of

ripping and then Lloyd was given the paper that had been taped across

the canvas. There was one word on it, crudely written.

Lloyd's eyes widened. He gestured around him, snapping his fingers.

'Julia! Julia! Find who wrote. .who wrote *this* and sack them now!' A

stressed-looking woman came reluctantly over and Lloyd pointed to a

young girl who sat reading near them. 'For God's sake, there are

children present!'

The child looked up and smiled, but Lloyd was already moving

away. The smile passed through the space where he had been. The

newcomer caught it instead and returned one of his own, with a green-

eyed look that twinkled like a star. Then he, too, was gone, hurrying

after Lloyd, short legs skipping in haste.

'So you *are* Mr Kingsley-Sayle? I'm delighted to meet you. My name's

Smith. John Smith. How do you do?'

'Smith?'

'Your new scientific adviser, of course!'

'Smith?'

Lloyd could only look at the man's clothes in disbelief. This John

Smith wore checked trousers, a loose, rumpled shirt with braces under

a long frock coat, his hair a thatch of black in which grey was beginning

to shine. The bow-tie at his throat was small and creased, giving the

appearance of someone who had been out for days and had yet to

change.

A wide smile dominated the man's face.

'That's right.'

'Scientific adviser?'

'Yes.'

'Not an actor, then?'

'No. Er, why?'

'Forget it.'

The new scientific adviser nodded towards the steps and the alien

receiving first aid at the hands of the prop department. His hands

knitted across his chest and a thoughtful frown accompanied his quiet

question: 'Having problems with the invasion, then?'

Lloyd sighed. 'You could say that.'

'And, er, why are they coming out of the sewers?'

'Common knowledge: that's how the invasion started.'

'No, no, no. My dear fellow, that's a common *misconception*. After all,

think about it. How *could* they? The sewers under London are Victorian



- notoriously unstable, collapsing all the time. And it would be easy to

put opposition in there. If they'd attacked through the sewers, that's

where they'd have been fought.'

'Look, Mister, this film is being marketed as being more realistic

than the *real* invasion.'

'Of course, that's why I'm here!'

'My reputation is on the line. I've got to deliver it straight, and

people *remember* them coming up from under the ground, OK?'

John Smith nodded and lifted placating hands.

'Ah, yes, but memory's so unreliable, isn't it? What *really* happened

was that they attacked through the main water-pipes. They didn't need

air, so that wasn't a problem, and you couldn't fight them until they

were out in the open.'

'Yeah. .' Lloyd thought about it a moment, calmed down a little.

'Yeah, that makes sense.'

The newcomer shrugged and smiled.

Lloyd frowned. 'So how do you know this? You couldn't have been

much more than a kid when it happened.. '

'Ah yes. Well, let's just say that I'm older than I look.'

Lloyd believed him. Couldn't say why, or how, just. .

'Julia! Change of plan! Get me the design team right now!'

In the darkness, tiny lights were glittering.

The noise of the chamber was barely more than the heartbeat of

something dreaming. Power pulsed lazily through dormant systems.

And then there was a change.

A zero became a one. And then another, and another. Dividing and

spreading. Data fed into waking, hungry computers screaming for input.

Strategy machines hummed into life.

'Schematic request: London water-supply systems.'

The pause was the time it took for a satellite to come into position;

scan the city below; eliminate needless data; appraise what remained.

'Assess strategic value of city invasion based on infiltration through

water-supply system.'

The answer came in an instant.

'Calculations improve on previous evaluations by 14.2 per cent.

Insufficient improvement to commit resources.'

New data channels opened.

'Store water-supply strategy proposal for future action.'

'So there you are, Doctor.'

The Doctor had hurried into the restaurant, dodging chairs, tables

and customers in a comical dance of avoidance.

'My dear Alistair, I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting. Do you

know, I lost all track of time!'

'Is that supposed to be funny, Doctor?'

'I assure you, Brig-'

'Doctor, please!'

The Brigadier was glancing around pointedly, all eyebrows and steely

looks, taking in the people near them.

'Oh, yes. .' The Doctor tapped his nose and nodded with concentration. 'Yes, of course.' He leaned towards his companion. 'I

say, isn't it exciting?'

'Quite. .' The Brigadier coughed in resignation, thrusting a napkin

into his collar. He ordered when a waiter came into earshot, then didn't

speak again until the young man had moved away.

'So how's the movie business, Doctor?'

'Oh, *very* interesting. I'm enjoying myself.'

'Yes, well, don't forget it's not entirely about your enjoyment.'

'Brigadier, Brigadier. .' The Doctor floundered. 'I haven't forgotten

UNIT's interests for a moment!'

The Brigadier winced. 'Dashed annoying business,' he grumbled,

reversing the cutlery setting, and then putting it straight.

'We should

have been allowed to have the damned thing stopped outright.'

'And for how many days would that have gone unnoticed?' the

Doctor asked carefully. 'The invasion happened. Nowadays no one

remembers it exactly how *we* know it happened, but *enough* remember

*something* to start getting suspicious if the film were stopped.'

'I've never trusted disinformation as a means of defence.'

'Well, of course,' the Doctor agreed. 'What better than a gun in your

hand, a grenade in your pocket and more explosions than you can

shake a swagger stick at, hmm?'

The Brigadier sighed. 'If we *could* keep to the matter at hand?'

'Eh? Oh. Oh, yes, well.' The Doctor leaned his head back to feel the

breeze from the fans whirling like helicopter blades above their heads.

'I've already talked them out of any reference to the sewers. So a lot of

our adventure is already part of a different history. And thank heavens

they never got hold of the name of the Cy-'

'Careful, Doctor,' the Brigadier warned. 'Probably best not to use

that word in public.'

'Oh, don't worry. Well.. apparently, London was invaded back then

by the Zexians.'

'The *Zexians*?'

'Well, I convinced them that no one knew what the invaders were

really called. In lieu of that, they wanted a name with "z"s and "x"s in

it. It's traditional in such matters, apparently.'

The Brigadier shook his head.

'And anyway, I should soon be finished. Apart from the sewers,

there are only a few other matters that need to be -' The Doctor

coughed theatrically. Heads turned. 'Diverted.'

'Doctor, please!'

The two friends looked at each other. A shadow of suspicion

deepened across the old soldier's face. 'You aren't having any trouble

with this, are you?' He watched a shifty expression ghost across the

features before him. 'I've known you too long, Doctor. . You may

change your face without much more than a howd'you-do, but you

don't change what's inside. And you don't like this, do you?'

The Doctor innocently met the Brigadier's eyes. 'Telling lies to

people who have a right to the truth? Now why should you think that?'

'I wonder. .' the Brigadier commented drily.

The Doctor sighed. 'Well, I must confess that some things have left

more pleasant tastes in the mouth, but that doesn't mean to say I don't

understand what's at stake. If telling lies is what I have to do to keep

UNIT a secret, then that's what I'll do.'

'I'm glad to hear it:

'Besides,' the Doctor added, working hard to maintain the innocent

expression on his face, 'there are all sorts of things here to keep me

interested.'

London. Long ago. I am watching an air raid, the skies dark,  
propped

up over the city by bright white beams. Flashes like  
lightning draw

sharp-edged buildings across the skyline, there for a  
moment and then

gone.

These are. .These are *not* my memories.

This is not who I am.

'Ah,' the Doctor breathed. 'Hello again. Am I too early?'

The set was a mass of structural ghosts in the gloom. It  
made the

Doctor uneasy as his footsteps echoed round the near-  
deserted room.

He looked at the inactive cameras, their heads bowed  
unseeing towards

the floor, and could not shake the feeling of being watched.  
The little

girl sat behind it all. She looked up, then turned a page in  
her book.

'Daddy's ordered a break while they get the smoke levels  
right.'

'I see.'

Two men wandered amongst a constructed control room - all



flashing lights and elaborate displays - spreading clouds of fog from

devices in their hands. The Doctor found himself thinking of another

time in London, deep below the streets.

'Well, anyway,' he said, brighter than necessary as he tugged his

mind back into the present, 'how do you do? I'm John, your father's

scientific adviser.'

'I know.'

'Oh. And you are?'

'I'm Kate. But you might as well call me "brat", "missy" or "precious". Everyone else does. They think I don't hear them.'

'No, no, I'm sure "Kate" will do. How old are you, Kate?'

'I'm seven. How old are you?'

'Oh, er. .Quite a lot older than that, I should think.'

Someone pushed through the double-doors at the back of the set,

noddod to the Doctor, ignored Kate, and began changing the viewfinder on a camera.

'I expect this must all be very exciting for you?'

Someone on the set gave a derisive laugh, but the Doctor wasn't

quick enough to see who it was. Kate sighed.

'It used to be. But I spend every holiday here and every weekend

and I really think I've seen *a*/ there is to see.'

There was an echo across the set; the girl's words being mimicked.

Again, the Doctor looked around to find the source. More people had

returned to the set. It could have been anyone.

'What about you, John? Have *you* seen this before?'

'Oh, er, no. Not really.'

There was an appeal in the girl's eyes as she folded the book away

and gestured to the space beside her. 'Well, you could stay here if you

like and I could tell you all about it.'

'Thank you,' the Doctor said with a dignified bow. 'I'd be delighted.'

Kate giggled, and the Doctor found himself giggling too.

They announced a break after one of the Zexian invaders fainted with

heat exhaustion.

As the Doctor left, he saw Lloyd crouched next to his daughter,

deep in a whispered conversation.

Half-way to the exit, a voice called after him.

'Er. .Mr Smith?'

Lloyd had to call again before the Doctor seemed to remember what

name he answered to. He turned around with a questioning smile, to

find Lloyd hurrying up to him.

'Mr Smith -'

'John, please,' he invited, getting back into character.

'John. I wonder if I might have a word?'

'Hmm?'

'It's about Kate. I gather you two have been getting on.'

'Well, yes, we have, rather.'

'It's just that it's not very easy for her. .being here, I mean. But since

her mother left, I'm all she's got.'

'Couldn't you. .Isn't there someone who might help out?'

The Doctor received a strange look. 'You weren't in this country last

year, were you?'

'You might be right there. Why?'

'The kidnapping. .You didn't hear?'

'Ah. .No.'

'She was gone almost a week. I blame myself: if I hadn't left her

with the stupid school, then. .' Lloyd shook himself out of his introspection. 'It's not happening again.'

'If you don't mind me asking, what did they want?'

'We never found out. Police found her wandering along a motorway

in Shropshire, not remembering a thing. But it was money. Bound to

be. Since they've started making big films in Britain, it happens more

than you'd think. Most times the press don't hear a thing and it's

resolved without publicity.'

'I take it there *was* publicity in this case?'

'Oh, yes.' Lloyd shuddered. 'Anyway, John, the thing is, you seem to

be very good with Kate. I really wanted to thank you. Forgive me, I

don't mean to insult you - but you seem to be on her level.'

'I think you'd be surprised at just what her level is.'

Lloyd avoided the Doctor's gaze to stare at the set and his daughter,

tiny-big before it.

'I'd just be grateful if you could keep an eye on her for me. She likes

you, and there's not many people I can say that about, believe me. I

know you're being paid as the scientific adviser here, so I'm probably

insulting you if I ask -'

'I quite understand. It would be an honour. And.. '

'What is it?'

'Well, I don't suppose I could have one of those nice folding chairs,

could I?'

As Joshua Sullivan lunged for the destruct switch, Tobias Vaughn

stepped out from behind the control room's central display screen.

There was a Zexian weapon in his hand. Sullivan stopped dead.

'The enterprising Joshua Sullivan. Well, well.. '

'You're never going to get away with this, Vaughn.'

'Oh dear. I expected rather better than that from you.'

The huge shapes of the robotic Zexians entered, the lights of the

control room reflecting in the blank masks of their faces.

Emotionlessly, they stared at Joshua. Their weapons were raised, along

with Vaughn's own. Everywhere Joshua looked, the muzzles of laser

weapons covered him.

'You're betraying your own kind, Vaughn!'

Vaughn laughed, stroking at his chest, in which metallic fragments

shone. 'Since the Zexians implanted their technology into me, I am

more like them than like you!'

'You can't do this!'

'You are too late! In an hour, the Earth kinetic computer's car -'

Vaughn stumbled over the words. 'The Earth computer's ko - No.

Hold on. I can do this. The Earth's chronological controls. The Earth

*computer's* kinetic chronological controls. .Er.'

'Cut!' Lloyd Kingsley-Sayle sagged away from behind the cameras

and swore to himself, before signalling to the crew. 'OK, start again.

And Michael, get it right this time!'

As the display on the clapperboard changed take twenty-nine into

thirty, the Doctor sat beside Kate, carefully braiding her hair for her.

He knew the words off by heart now.

'Um. Er, Lloyd?' he called with reluctance.

The eyes that met his call were shot through with impatience. It

seemed he was being watched from all over the set.

'Yes, John?'

'I was just wondering why it mattered so much if Michael here - I

mean, Tobias - had to say "Earth computer's kinetic  
chronological

controls". It not only sounds silly but it's woefully  
inaccurate.'

'You have a better suggestion? One you couldn't have made  
sooner?

,

The hostile looks the Doctor was receiving brought a  
nervous smile

to his face. 'Well, sometimes it takes a little while for these  
things to

filter through,' he said. 'It's just that the Zexians would have  
been a lot

better off using a phased Tachyon technology in the first  
place. .and

maybe that's a little easier to say?'

'Phased Tacy. .Phased Tachyon technology, oh yes, I can  
manage

that, Lloyd.' Michael beamed at his director.

'All right, all right. Sarah, make the change in the script. OK,  
people,

let's go again.'

New information crept into the strategy systems. Fingers of  
light



stretched through displays and indicators, flexing with life.

'Schematic request: phased Tachyon technology research.'

The systems became dark.

'Schematic not present.'

'Evaluate implications of phased Tachyon technology,  
utilising

previous references to subjects. Extrapolate schematic from  
implied

and located data.'

'New schematic completed. Phased Tachyon technology  
evaluated.'

'Assess strategic value of city invasion based on infiltration  
through

water-supply system for units equipped with phased  
Tachyon

technology.'

'Calculations improve on previous evaluations by 41 per  
cent.

Recent improvements calculated against time of  
improvements indicate

potential of further data collection.'

'Store new schematics in priority channels. Continue  
collection.'

Human eyes have never seen this. Human bodies would not withstand

being here. It is only through the metal of my skin and the protection

of my systems that I survive.

The eight moons of Thera Secaul rise and fall over a ravaged, airless

world, as if juggled by something just beyond the horizon. One of the

moons has an atmosphere and is ghostly in the skies. Another is ice and

slices sunlight across this world like a diamond. Two spin around

themselves like twins unable to let each other go.

The dead Secaul sands are thrown by seismic rage into the skies,

expanding into bouquets of colour.

They are beautiful.

Human eyes have never seen this.

These are not my memories. This is not who I am.

The set's huge lights came on as the Doctor arrived, making him blink

uncomfortably as he approached his chair. Two of the crew were

exchanging reminiscences and their words reached the Doctor as he

passed.

'Don't you remember Winters doing that party trick - all the FA Cup

players back to 1952?'

'I remember *Jordan* doing it. Mind like a steel trap.'

'Jordan? You sure?'

Kate was already there, staring unseeing across an open book,

Lloyd's attempts at conversation going unheard beside her.

'Good morning, my dear!'

There was no response. The Doctor's smile faltered. He produced a

paper bag from his pocket. 'Anyone for a gobstopper?'

Lloyd stood up, failed to meet the Doctor's eye. 'Maybe you could

have a word,' he muttered, then moved away.

The Doctor heard him moments later, clapping his hands and

shouting orders, and the noise seemed unwelcome in the brooding

silence of the set.

'Are you all right, Kate?' the Doctor asked.

The girl nodded, still gazing across the book.

'Gobstopper?'

The girl shook her head.

The Doctor opened his mouth to speak, then closed it again.

He

fumbled through his coat pockets, but nothing he could find seemed

appropriate. He gave a sad exhalation and edged his chair just a little

closer.

'I'm sorry, but I just don't understand.'

'Oh, Michael, what is it now?'

The Doctor's head lifted as he focused on the latest argument. He

shot a glance at Kate, but she was still staring into the middle distance.

The book had been on the same page ever since he had arrived.

'Well, Lloyd, this Tobias Vaughn. I don't understand why he would

do this.'

'Do what?'

'Betray his world, be responsible for all this death and destruction.

Why? I mean, what's my motivation here?'

Lloyd looked up to the heavens, and then to the Doctor, who gave a

nervous start as he realised that the rest of the crew were now staring at

him too.

'Oh, er, yes?'

'John, maybe you can help?'

'Oh, I really don't -'

'I know, I know, science is your thing, but as the one man on this

set who seems to give a damn about *quality* -'

The Doctor flushed and interrupted him hastily. 'Oh, motivation,

yes. .Well, I don't think anyone can be a lot of help there, you know.

Tobias Vaughn was an unstable, sadistic megalomaniac, crazed with

ambition. There's no real explanation for it.'

'That's it?' the actor reacted in outrage. 'No childhood bullying, no -'

The Doctor flapped out his hands in a calming gesture. 'Oh, perhaps, perhaps, but I really feel you're missing the point!' He became

calmer, more confidential, as if inviting them to mull over his words.

'Vaughn's obsessions got in the way, if you think about it, didn't they?

He was one of those "big picture" people, you see. Now, if he'd been

more focused.. Say, driven by a personal bereavement or personal sense

of loss. Now that's a very different kettle of fish.'

'I see. .' The actor nodded, realisation spreading across his face with

increasing enthusiasm. 'Yes. That makes sense. I see. Bereavement. Yes,

now if somehow my wife had been killed and my only way for revenge

was to unite with these monsters. .Hmm.. I wonder, could we get some

lines in to that effect, Lloyd?'

'Well.. '

'I'd feel so much happier. Give you *real* quality.'

'Instead of real heartburn? It's got to be worth it,' said Lloyd.  
'Julia!

Make it happen!'

The lights were being shut down as the Doctor yawned and  
rose from

his seat. He extended a hand towards Kate and waggled his  
fingers at

her.'Are you coming, my dear?' He frowned. 'Kate? You'll be  
left in the

dark.'

'Don't mind the dark.'

'Well, if you're sure.' The Doctor stepped deliberately away,  
his

footsteps resounding on the concrete.

'Have you ever had an operation?'

He stopped and turned at the words. 'Oh, is that what this is  
all

about?' he asked. 'Oh, yes. All sorts.'

'What about a ton. .a tonsil.. ?'

'A tonsillectomy? No, but I know lots of people who have. It's  
nothing to worry about, and when you wake up there's all  
the ice cream

you can eat.'

'I'm scared.'

'Scared? Oh, but there's no need for that, no, no.' He took her hand

and patted it. 'You mustn't be scared, really.'

Kate bit her lip and nodded. The Doctor could see tears, sparkling

in her eyes.

'Come now, let's see a smile. Everything will be lovely.'

'I wish you could be there with me.'

The Doctor's face fell. He stumbled over words. His fingers stretched his collar as if he had become suddenly hot. 'Ah, well.. ' he

began, and tailed off. Then he smiled. 'Here, you take this. Keep it with

you during the operation and then I *will* be with you, won't I, sort of?'

Kate took the offered object, and a smile blossomed amongst tear

tracks. Then she took the Doctor's hand and let him lead her away.

In her other hand she held a spotted bow-tie.

'Data file request: psychological assessment of all potential agents.'



Compare with master file 7243-8-28032-2-5 Vaughn. Reject all files

where psychological assessment is below master file level of motivation.'

The systems scanned through thousands, people flashing into

existence for a moment, there and then forgotten.

Some were retained.

'Ninety-eight agents found with sufficient motivational factors.

Eight agents exceed set psychological thresholds by factor greater than

twelve.'

'Incorporate highest candidate in stored city invasion schematic.

Reassess success probability.'

The person was plucked from data records and woven into new

plans as a vital link. Numbers moved around them.

'Calculations improve on previous evaluations by 77.8 per cent.

Store new schematics in priority channels. Continue collection.'

No! Planet 14 explodes around me in the final seconds of my life. The

power of the planet has been used against us and there will be no

escape.

This *cannot* be who I am, for I am living and yet all I can remember

is ending.

Our homeworld's power is drawn away from us. I can feel it leaving

me, draining out of my memory cells so that nothing remains but a

numb darkness.

I can experience a thousand remembered deaths But none of them

is mine. This *cannot* be.

I have been floating in space for nearly a hundred years. All that

time I can perceive the gravitational fields drawing me towards this

system's sun as if I were on an unbreakable thread. The end, when it

comes, is of radiation merging flesh and metal into a fleeting comet of

vapour.

These are *not* my memories. This is *not* who I am.

'Er, Mr Smith? John?'

'No. .' Kate's face creased in an effort of patience. 'No, silly. Put

your hands out like *this*.'

John Smith nodded enthusiastically. 'Ah, yes, now I see.' He beamed

as he offered his hands and she bound them with thin wool. The red

lines criss-crossed in a simple pattern.

'Now you -'

'Don't worry.' Smith winked. 'I think I'm with you.'

Kate was not sure what happened next. The hands before her

moved several times and then the pattern had become something

complex and fascinating. She tried to follow the threads with her

fingers, but they never seemed to go where they should.

She stared up with new respect. 'How did you do that?'

'Oh, one picks these things up. Here, lift your hands.'

In a moment the pattern was transferred. Kate backed away as if she

held a spider's web and a breath would destroy it. Only then did the

adviser look up at the insistent calling of his name.

'Oh goodness, I'm so sorry. Did you mean me?'

'If you wouldn't mind?'

Lloyd stood surrounded by extras in militaristic uniforms

brandishing weapons. The diminutive figure of the film's scientific

adviser hurried over, coat-tails flapping behind him.

But Kate was too fascinated with the gossamer construction at her

fingertips to pay much attention.

The sun was sinking behind the London skyline as the Doctor emerged

from Leicester Square tube station. He hurried past some energetic

buskers, barely pausing to throw away a handful of the 'spending

money' he had been given.

He approached a public telephone with trepidation, frowning short-

sightedly at the diagrams for use, then sighing as he scratched his head.

A few moments with the sonic screwdriver and he had a ringing

tone.

'Lethbridge-Stewart.'

'Ah, Brigadier!'

'Is that you, Doctor? Everything all right?'

'Oh, yes. All sorts of fun today. We've been doing some crowd

scenes.' He pronounced the last words with pride at his mastery of the

jargon.

'I see.'

'Yes, I saw how UNIT might look battling the Zexians - terribly

exciting. All sorts of bangs and flashes.'

'What? You sanctioned -'

'Oh, don't worry. I made sure that it wasn't *seen* to be UNIT.'

'I should hope so, Doctor. That *is* why you're there.'

'Quite. No, no, I explained how a specialised team like UNIT would

have been neutralised well before an invasion attempt -'

'How very reassuring.'

'And they were happy to use the normal army in its place.

Apparently the costumes are cheaper. Do you know, they were so

delighted, I was even offered a part in the final battle -'

'What!'

'Oh, do calm down, Brigadier. The uniform didn't quite fit. Couldn't

have a soldier tripping over his turn-ups, could they? Unthinkable. .'

'Now, Doctor, let me make this quite clear. You are on a mission to

misinform. That's hardly going to happen if you appear in the blessed

footage!'

The Doctor looked mournfully at the silent receiver in his hand and

then carefully replaced it. The expression stayed on his face as he

turned towards Leicester Square.

And then changed completely as he slipped a recorder out of his

pocket and advanced meaningfully on the buskers.

The systems awoke, considered the new data and then accessed long-

dormant areas of storage with an electronic excitement.

'Load schematic of London invasion. Reassess probability of success

if encountered Earth military are not familiar with invasion force.'

Power moved into computers not used since the installation began

life. Numbers were formed, reduced, formed and reduced, tumbling

through themselves in a cascade of information.

'Calculations improve on previous evaluations by 94.1 per cent.

Improvement to evaluations require prioritising of new schematic. Data

signal to fleet to be prepared for transmission when 100 per cent value

achieved.'

The installation remained lit. Something almost like hope surged

through systems in the form of a number growing ever closer to

perfection.

The man's beret rolls down the alley like a hubcap even as the blast has

thrown his body smoking into a brick wall.

These are not my memories. This is not who I am.

In a tunnel, the light of a weapon's discharge turns moisture into

vapour, and the flesh in the way just disappears.

These are *not* my memories. This is not -

I extend my hand and the muzzle clamped to the back of it sends

arcs of power across the space before me. The plastic walls of the

corridor blister while the weak organisms before me practically explode.

More obstructions, screaming. Even as my hand slices down with

fatal momentum, I can see the schematics directing the blow to its best

placing. Bone and skin split and fracture.

Help me. This is not me. This is not who I am!

I walk through fire and brush away the intensity aimed at me. The



people beyond the flames start to run but I have fire of my own. Their

skins are not as mine, and I watch them peel. The people stumble and

fall. These are not my memories. This is not who I am.

These things are not me. I remember. .

The figures stood huddled together, blinded by the glare of retros fired

for the final descent, buffeted by the down-blast as dust swirled around

them.

'It's the Zexian mothership!'

They exchanged terrified looks as a shadow began to fall across

them.

'And.. cut! Excellent, everyone.'

When the smoke machines were stopped, the only sound that Lloyd

could hear was a gentle tut-tutting behind him.

'Is there a problem, John?'

The little man rocked on his heels and pressed his hands together

before him, offering an apologetic smile.

'Well, I hardly dare mention it, but. .'

'Yes?'

'I just don't understand why the Zexians would all land in one place.

This landing-beacon thing, I mean. .Well, it's not very likely, is it?'

Lloyd threw his arms up in the air in disbelief. 'Did our researchers

get *nothing* right?'

'They really seem to have got the wrong side of the, er, story. I'm

surprised. You see, London was only *one* of the main landing sites.'

'It was?'

'Oh, goodness, yes. The Zexian fleet made more-or-less simultaneous landings with sixty-four ships, evenly dispersed across the

globe to enable reliability of communications and to divide resistance. It

was a very elegant scheme.'

'So what defeated them?'

'A gold allergy. Yes, their systems are unable to process gold dust,

you see. It causes massive short-circuiting.'

'Who found *that* out?' Lloyd protested.

'I really have no idea.'

'And couldn't you have told me sooner? I mean, you have read this

script, haven't you?'

The Doctor sucked ponderously on a finger and seemed puzzled, as

if trying to remember.

Lloyd sighed, and beckoned over an unfortunate script editor. He

glared at his scientific adviser. 'Sixty-four ships? Are you sure?'

'Oh, absolutely. It's the minimum required to ensure a multi-rooting

low-band-width communications system. Impossible to interrupt,

capable of incredible resilience. A practically perfect plan.'

'Schematic request: recent developments on inhibitions to system

functioning, reference gold.'

'Gold no longer inhibitive to function since systems refinement 542-

4. All units pre-refinement 542 will not be deployed until upgrades can

be actioned.'

The response satisfied the strategy machines.

'Update request: regenerate invasion schematic based upon previous

data including sixty-four atmosphere-capable module landings including

consequent multiple-node communications network.'

The computers began their work even as the first words of the new

instructions were fed into them.

An answer finished the calculations; a single neat number.

'Calculations bring improvement on previous evaluations to 100 per

cent. New schematic processed through simulation indicates total

success of invasion. Prepare to transmit data signal to fleet.'

Power levels fluctuated as the data was passed into equipment that

would send the message to the stars. A single warning raised in the

strategy processors and action paused.

'Consult resources manager: request number of atmosphere-capable

fleet-transport modules.'

The computers took a moment to return the answer.

'Four.'

'We don't have the budget for that many ships,' someone was telling

Lloyd.

'Look, if that's how many it took the original Zexian invasion, then

damn it, that's how many we're going to use!' he replied.

John Smith was behind him, watching the exchange with interest.

'Well exactly,' he added with a chuckle. 'Imagine having done all this

work only to fall at the last fence.'

'Oh, come on,' Lloyd appealed. 'We can cut back on some of the

opening effects shots, maybe double up on some of the later work.

Surely we can stretch this?'

'Would you excuse me for a while?' Smith suddenly announced.

'There's something I have to do.'

'Projection required: time of resource growth sufficient to  
action new

invasion plan at 100 per cent success rate.'

The response was fed back quickly from strategy units that  
had

already asked the same question.

'At present resource-growth rate, date will not be within the  
operational life-span of this unit.'

The lighting in the installation dimmed.

'Request action.'

'Unit to become dormant until new data can be processed.'

The lights went out.

It is dark. It is the darkness of loneliness. There is nothing  
here. Is this

me? It is silent. No voices in my head, no memories not my  
own that still

sting my eyes and ears with remembrance.

There are no memories. Is this who I am?

All I have left in the darkness is a word, but it is so long since  
it has

been used that it comes stranger to me than the things I  
have seen or

heard.

The word is Kate.

This is not my name. This is not who I am.

In the darkness of the strategy installation, a hatch fell from  
the ceiling

and clattered to the floor. Dank air from the cave system  
beyond

condensed in the warmth of the small spaceship's interior.

A short figure dropped inside, even as lights and weapons  
powered

up. 'Now, now, let's not do anything hasty,' the Doctor said  
slowly,

raising his hands out before him. 'Yes. .Yes, I thought I'd find  
you

here.'

The room seemed to pause all around him. It knew who he  
was.

'A Cyber-infiltration unit. .' he mused, as if viewing an  
exhibit at a

museum. 'I've heard of them but never actually seen one  
before. .'

The Doctor knitted his hands across his chest and peered curiously

around him. A picture of Kate shone on one of the displays, and the

Doctor's features darkened as he decoded the words 'SURGICAL

HISTORY' beneath it. He gingerly reached past a wary sentinel auto-

probe and touched a control. The room waited in silence, almost as if

gloating, as the Doctor flicked through record after record: sports

heroes, politicians, military personnel, more media people.

'My, my,' the Doctor murmured. 'You have been busy.'

'You must be destroyed.'

'Now, I wouldn't do that! I'm not the only person who knows where

this place is, you know!'

'You must be destroyed.'

The Doctor relaxed. 'I'm amazed you didn't think anyone would

find the implant in the girl's head. You can't see it if you look, I grant



you, but if you feel her scalp it's just there under the surface.'

The systems waited on his next words.

'Now here's what we're going to do. When you put that thing into

her head, you overwrote areas of her mind with control software and

your own memory. You will give me the memories you overwrote and

then you will leave Earth.'

'And if this unit does not leave?'

'I only stalled things this long so that I could triangulate the origins

of your control signals. It's how I found you. The co-ordinates will be

in UNIT's hands before the night is out. I got here in just a few hours -

imagine how quickly all those helicopters and planes will arrive!' He

looked sternly round at the room. 'You really won't want to be here

tomorrow.'

The girl lay unconscious on the operating table. Monitor units displayed

her status as staff finished the tonsillectomy.

Shift change.

A new team entered, ushering out the old. Different equipment was

wheeled in and activated; sophisticated devices whose function would

have baffled the previous team.

A member of the previous team returned: a short man, his eyes

twinkling over the top of his mask.

'There's a little further surgery required,' he announced authoritatively.

'Are you the surgeon here?'

'Oh, I wouldn't say that;' he replied airily, checking the patient's

hand. It held a strip of spotted material tightly. 'More a sort of

doctor. .'

Tiny flames leap into the air. Noise becomes *Happy Birthday* sung by the

family's off-key choir in different tempos and pitches.

The cake is blue hiding chocolate. Yellow lettering spells *Kate* and

*six.*I remember this.

Mine.

Missing, Part One: Business as Usual

by Gary Russell

*Sal y's Cafe, Edward Street, Brighton, East Sussex*

*23 July 1991. 14.02.*

Detective Inspector Bob Lines of Brighton CID pushed open the door

of the tiny cafe, his well-trained eyes scanning the clientele in a

moment. A couple of haulage drivers, at least one known crack dealer

they couldn't pin anything on, a couple of tourists. .

But his quarry was on her own, to the right of the cafe. Quite a few

years older than when they'd last met, her red curls chopped to a short

bob and wearing a set of smart clothes which might have come from a

Knightsbridge store but could just as easily have been bought in

another galaxy. Her eyes met Bob's and for a brief moment there was a

flash of extreme sadness in them. But it passed. And in its place, just a

hint of disappointment - not that he was there, but at something else.

Being back in Brighton, probably.

'Miss Bush,' he said, sitting opposite her. 'Good to see you again.

Must have been at least two years.' He knew damn well. Two years

since they had met. Two years since they had been allied with his old

friend, the Doctor (the version with the blond curls, the garish clothes

and a propensity to shout a lot and look indignant whenever someone

proved him wrong). Two years since they had put the affairs of

SeneNet to rest.

'Almost to the day, Mr Lines. .Although for me it's been - well, quite

a few years longer. I only remembered it was my birthday yesterday,

Dad's tomorrow. I'd forgotten the importance of birthdays. Time travel

does that to you.' She looked up at him with a sudden desperation.

'How are they?'

Bob Lines smiled. He was glad that had been her first question.

'They're absolutely fine, both of them. Missing you terribly of course,

but they've had a couple of cards, according to your dad. One from

New York, I think, last Christmas. He said something about Stalagdons

or something.'

'Stalagtrons,' said Mel absently. Then she added: 'They'll get a few

more before the turn of the century as well. I was - or will be, or have

been - very good at staying in touch whenever I could.' Mel smiled

suddenly. 'Who's number one in the charts then?'

'Haven't a clue,' shrugged Lines. 'Thanks, Sal.' he added as two cups

of tea were placed on their table. He looked at Mel. 'My shout.' She

smiled, gratefully, and he nodded. 'I didn't think the Doctor would have

thought to give you any Earth money.'

'I haven't seen him. Not for ages.' She looked down. 'I've no idea

where he is. But I want to go home.' She looked up again, the

desperation back. 'If you think it'll be all right with them?'

Bob grinned. 'All right? They'll be overjoyed. And so will that

American lad who's been living there. He's been helping a couple of my

lot out recently. Seems the Doctor was right about those mental powers

of his. .He's come in quite handy at spotting a liar or two.'

Mel smiled slightly at this. 'Good old Trey. You know, Mr Lines,

I've been places and seen people where his powers would seem

primitive. Or at the very least common-or-garden.' She sighed. 'I've

seen people from all walks of life on Earth mirrored throughout the

galaxy. The good, the bad and the downright ugly.' She drank her tea.

'It's the same all over, up there.' She nodded towards the ceiling, but

Bob knew she was indicating much higher than that. 'People wanting to

hurt each other. Or help each other. Making money, losing money. I

thought going off into outer space would take me away from the

mundanity of Earth. But the only real difference is that the guns make a

louder bang, the clothes are a bit more exotic and some people look

like lions or purple turnips.' She finished her tea with a final swig. 'It's a

diversion, Mr Lines. That's all. Not an escape, not a new life, just a new

twist on the norm. It got boring very quickly. And a lot of good people

died.'

For a moment neither of them spoke, then Bob swallowed his tea in

one gulp and reached out to touch her hand, to bring her back to

reality. 'You want to go home now? I'll run you up there if you like'.

'Are you sure?'

Bob Lines smiled. 'Miss Bush - Melanie. You're a friend of a good

friend of mine, and the much-loved and missed daughter of another.

It's no bother at all. And I can fill you in on a couple of years' worth of

planet Earth history if you want.'

'It's strange to be back.' She realised he was looking at her quizzically, and shrugged apologetically. 'Very strange.'

Bob stood up and so did Mel. 'Any regrets?'

Mel looked at him. Or rather, through him, in that way the Doctor

used to. Something to do with time travel, he supposed.

'No, not really. But you know what? I wouldn't do it again. It was an

experience, and I did meet a lot of wonderful people, but I'm glad to be

home. It's where the heart is.' She crossed to the cafe door with him.

'Time for Melanie Bush to get back to business as usual.'

Moon Graffiti

by Dave Stone



Kimo Ani made his silent way through the white-walled tunnels - at

least, he tried to make his way silently. The clammy soles of feet used

to a life of air-sealed membrane made unpleasant sucking sounds and

squeaks on the slick polypropylene floor. He was painfully aware of his

breathing: a positive and conscious *effort* to haul air into the lungs, the

strained and strangely painless thudding of the heart behind them. His

extremities were red and grey: they ached and trembled and felt hot and

strangely distant. He thought he was having some kind of heart failure.

These were, of course, just the symptoms of chronic

hyperventilation - the cause of which, in turn, was a terror he had never

experienced in his life. 'Terror' was merely one of any number of things

Kimo Ani had never truly experienced. The cycles of the Line and its

senseless and recursive routine did not allow for any emotional

variation and its learned response. Stepping out of Line was akin to

falling off some mental precipice and plunging, headlong, into a

vertiginous chaos with which the mind could not yet cope.

As the white-walled tunnels seemed to pitch and yaw around him,

turned alien and menacing not so much in themselves as in his new

relationship to them, Kimo Ani wondered if his mind would ever learn

to cope. He clutched the Talisman closer to his knotted, aching

stomach, and forced himself to carry on. The terror of the Unknown

lay before him, but if he gave up now and slunk back to the Line there

would be nothing but a commonplace and endless living death.

The Talisman glowed more faintly now than when it had appeared.

The light seemed to be retreating, slowly, from its edges and extremities. A kind of reddish, lazily swirling light like a viscous liquid

thing in itself pulsed in the slits on its face from which it spoke. And

now it spoke again:

*'Look, are we going to be hanging around here all night or what?'* It said in a

high, shrill, polyphonic voice. *'This is getting right on my wick and no*

*mistake. Let's just pick the damn feet up and have it away on our toes, OK?'*

A warm breeze drifted through the night: dry and chemical-tasting, not

so much with an air of toxicity as with the smell of soot, potash and

airborne gypsum from some builders' rubble yard. Through the dark

tangle of wreckage - a landscape in itself, undulating to the skyline,

geographical features built from petrified garbage - fires were burning

with a kind of gentle constancy that suggested they had burnt for years,

and would burn for years to come.

The wreckscape had a kind of desolate stillness about it - the remote

sense one gets on walking through the ruins of some abbey sacked in

bloody conflict, centuries ago. Death and destruction on ice.

Peri shivered, despite the warmth and softness of the wind.

Seemingly of their own volition, her hands kept picking at her upper

arms, nervously twitching and fingering the sleeves of her shirt. She

*really* wished that the increasingly malfunctioning TARDIS had been

able to supply her with something other than a shirt at least a size too

small, obviously intended for an adolescent, made from nylon with a

tacky iron-on decal of a heart that was already starting to peel. The lack

of anything even remotely more suitable, she recalled bitterly, was only

one of the more minor of the symptoms of the problems that had

brought them here in the first place.

'You said this was Earth,' she said. 'This isn't Earth. How can this be

Earth?'

'You're just subconsciously expecting it to be the world you remember,' the Doctor said, unconcerned. 'The "Earth", as such,

doesn't enter into it, except in purely galactographic terms. This is just a

place that used to have that name.'

He pulled the door of the TARDIS shut and locked it with a lozenge-like key on a ball-bead chain. He twirled the key a couple of

times before letting go, so that it flipped in mid-air and dropped neatly

into the pocket of his horrid coat. The gesture seemed a little reminiscent of the studied relaxation of a Frontier gunfighter: casually

showing some upstart opponent a little trick he could do in his sleep.

Quite whom this upstart opponent was seemed unclear - unless,

perhaps, the universe in general.

'We're several tens of thousand years beyond your particular time-

frame, Peri,' he continued. 'More than enough to make your own

personal dating-system completely and utterly meaningless.  
Ages, aeons

and entire civilisations have come and gone, and never  
given what you

know of *your* world a second thought.'

Peri found herself irritated, not so much by what the Time  
Lord had

said as by his tone, which contrived to suggest that  
everything she had

ever been, or seen, or done had been completely and utterly  
insignificant and ineffectual, had not affected anything  
worthwhile for

good, or ill, or at all. 'So what are *we* doing here, then?' she  
asked

sourly.

'The old girl needs recalibration.' The Doctor patted the  
battered

outer shell of the TARDIS affectionately, as one might pet  
some

favourite but rather elderly and infirm maiden aunt. 'In the  
occasional

lapses of my post-regenerative state I damaged her rather  
more than I'd

thought, and acquiring a supply of zeiton 7 from Varos was  
only one of

our problems. Several key control systems are still severely disrupted - I

believe you've experienced some of the knock-on effects of that

yourself of late.'

'If you mean not having had a proper meal in days,' said Peri, 'then

you're right.'

Opening the wardrobe in her room to find completely unsuitable

clothing had been the least of it. The corridors and chambers around

the Console Room had acquired a sudden knack for shifting themselves

around when your back was turned, so that you could wander about in

them for hours without getting anywhere. The state-of-the-culinary-art

utilities in the kitchens had transformed, overnight, into a . . *thing* which,

when activated, had belched blue smoke and churned its pistons, and

had eventually produced a tray of tin-tack sandwiches, a lemon on a

plate and a bowl of what had looked and smelled like puréed sprouts

with a daffodil stuck in it.

And the less said about the current contents of the swimming pool

the better. With that special kind of mild unease that occurs with the

glimmerings of a nasty thought, it occurred to her that her irritation

with these peripherally irritating things had prevented her from

wondering what they meant to the *truly* vital things like interdimensional

navigation and the mechanisms that supplied the air. .

'Everything I do to fix her merely breaks something else,' the

Doctor was saying, 'including her ability to tell if something actually

*needs* to be repaired or not - we're stuck in a classic catastrophe of

regression. What we need is an external factor that can serve as a

benchmark.'

'And we're going to find that here?' Peri said dubiously, scanning the



wreckscape around them for absolutely anything that might be of any

use. Nothing seemed to fit the bill.

'This is one of the places where the .item I'm looking for has been

known to occur. The easiest place to get to, all things considered. We

can always remember where it is, no matter what else we might happen

to forget.' He became pensive, and looked upwards. 'I just wish it had

been a time in which the Earth was in better circumstances.'

Peri followed his gaze. Scudding cloud-cover was tearing itself apart

like a sheet of calico caught on a nail; she looked up and saw the full,

bright Moon and what had been done to it.

' *What are you stopping for now?*' snapped the voice from the Talisman, as

Kimo Ani backed away from the ladder leading upwards to the Higher

levels.

'I can hear a Monitor,' Kimo Ani told it in a hurried whisper - and

indeed, from the hatchway above, there could be heard the clanking

and whirring of caterpillar treads. The sound did not seem immediately

threatening; the Monitor seemed to be merely on patrol - but any loud

noise at this point would bring it down upon them.

' *Please* keep quiet,' Kimo Ani hissed urgently. 'Must not make a

sound. I will try to find another way.'

' *Wel just be quick about it,*' the voice from the Talisman grumbled.

' *Hurry it up. Chop-chop.*'

As Kimo Ani hurried back along the tunnel, looking for some other

route upward, it occurred to him with a rush of some not entirely

unpleasant feeling that he could not name that he had done something

else that was new.

Even when the Talisman had appeared before him, with its offers of

pleasure and power undreamt of if he did what the Talisman wanted, he

had not understood what that meant - he had never dreamt of pleasure

or power in the first place. Kimo Ani had quite simply waited until he

could act without being seen by the Monitors, then peeled off his

protective membranes, taken the Talisman away and headed up towards

the Surface, simply because he had been *told* to. Even something so

minor as *pleading* with something else - that minuscule and almost

entirely ineffectual level of attempting to temper the will of something

other than his own - was the most contentious thing he had ever done

in his life.

Now, as he crept through the tunnels with the muttering and grumbling Talisman, looking for another way up and doing so simply

because something other than himself had told him to, for the first

time Kimo Ani found himself wondering precisely *why*...

Peri stared aghast at the markings scrawled across the face of the Moon

like magic-marker slashes on a rest-room door. The very shape of them

seemed hateful, dripping with an intent to insult and befoul. She had

no idea what kind of alien processes or substance had been used in

their making, but a nasty little voice in her mind had its suspicions.

'Is that supposed to be some kind of language?' she breathed. 'Is it

supposed to *say* something?'

'Well, a reasonably literal translation might be *AI -Hominid-*

*Aboriginals-of-This-Place-are-Known-for-Attempting-to-Mate-with-Their-Own-*

*Persons-and-AI -Pararachnids-are-very-Much-Better-than-Same,*'

said

the

Doctor. 'I'll take it as read that you wouldn't be interested in an, as it

were, more pithy translation.'

'Pararachnids?' Peri found that she had gone from shivering with

unnamed trepidation to positively *shaking* with a hot and almost

cripplingly atavistic rage. Defiling something so basic to her world as

the Moon seemed like a physical assault, as though someone had

actually slapped her. Later, when she was in a fit state to notice such

things, she would find that she had clenched her fists hard enough to

drive the nails some way into her palms. 'Who are the Pararachnids?

Were they the things that did all this?'

The Doctor nodded. 'They're a variation of space-borne swarming

organism - though with a difference from the swarming insects and

pack-animals indigenous to the Earth. The swarm itself has cohesion

and instinct, but no real cumulative intelligence. The individual

components of it are self-aware and intelligent, tool-using and hat-

wearing after a fashion - in the same way that some vicious human

moron with a club and a pork-pie hat is intelligent, tool-using and hat-

wearing as compared to a ring-tailed lemur.' His gesture took in the

whole expanse of the gently smouldering wreckscape. 'The

Pararachnids are basically vandals - they mark their territory by laying it

to waste and dragging the wreckage into a big heap. That renders it

uninhabitable, of course, even for Pararachnids, and so the swarm

moves on.' He shrugged. 'I've always found it one of the more pointless

biological processes.'

He regarded the devastation, evaluating the damage critically, as one

might observe the particulars of a not particularly interesting new breed

of moth under a microscope. 'The Earth was hit by a relatively minor

swarm, I'd say. Seventy, eighty billion at the most. They'll be long gone

by now, of course, leaving only their weak and their crippled behind.'

Peri tried to imagine the Pararachnid swarm as it fell out of the sky

and tore the world to shreds. She failed - the magnitude of it was too

much for the mind; it was quite literally unthinkable. 'What about the

people?' she managed to ask. 'Are the people dead?'

'In their millions,' said the Doctor, 'if we're merely talking about

*human* people as opposed to all other strains of indigenous biological

life. Those who didn't die, or were evacuated in sufficient time, were

forced underground - not so much of an undertaking as you might

think, incidentally. This was one of those periods when the population

of the Earth was a mere fraction of that of your time. People were

numbered in the millions rather than the billions.' He shrugged,

seemingly completely unconcerned. 'Things could have been worse.'

Peri had to confess to being unsure how. 'This could be stopped. All

of this. We could just go back in time to beat the monsters.  
That's what

we do, isn't it?'

'No, it isn't,' the Doctor snapped. Then he sighed, as though  
preparing to explain, once again, to a particularly dense  
child, that it

wasn't such a good idea to wear the underpants outside of  
the trousers.

'That isn't what we do, and we don't do it here, and we  
certainly can't

do it now. This is one of the key points in the history of the  
planet -

the razing of Earth was the catalyst for a massive rebuilding  
and

expansion in centuries to come. From this mulch will grow a  
thousand

new cities and nations, entire civilisations, some of them  
inexpressibly

beautiful, some unspeakably and brutally draconian, some  
of them

merely indifferent. If we attempt to interfere directly, to  
rewrite the

wrongs of the world here and now, none of that would ever  
exist.' He



stomped through crunching calcine debris that Peri could only hope

was some kind of petrified timber or suchlike. 'We've come here

looking for a single, specific item and that's all.'

'This "item" again,' Peri said. 'That's the second time you've talked

about "an item". Are you ever going to get around to telling me what it

actually *is*, or is something like that too big and complicated for my tiny

human brain?'

The Time Lord looked at her face, and wisely decided not to answer

in the way she fully expected. Instead, he took out a large brass fob

watch and absently studied its complicated but strangely hazy and

indecipherable face. 'I think we might have time before things make

themselves evident. How much do you remember of the cosmology of

Event One?'

Ever upwards, up inclines, ramps and shafts inset with cold-cast rungs,

occasionally backtracking to avoid the sight and sound of Monitors on

patrol. Up through the Higher Levels where nothing human had set

foot for years, although perpetual light still burned. Dust being a

product of human habitation, the tunnels remained bare and pristine.

Little robotic cleaning mechanisms the size and general shape of

spiders, alerted by the presence of Kimo Ani, scuttled from their

housings and fought each other viciously for the traces of contamination he left in his wake: the beads of sweat and shed skin

cells. After centuries of inactivity they were ravenous to the point of

cybernetic madness.

Ever onward, ever upward, ever closer to the final goal - until, at

last, he came to the massive armoured butterfly-hatches that he had

only ever seen in the historical edu-tapes streamed to him, as had been

the nutrients through tubes, when he was small and waiting to be big

enough for his induction to the Line itself. Kimo Ani was mentally

unequipped to imagine what might lay beyond these shutters. If pressed,

he would probably have guessed a network of the same kind of tunnels

and shafts beyond as were behind - but the point was that they would

be *other* shafts and tunnels, entirely different in a way that he could not

define. The basic sense, in short, of some outside, other world.

The shutters were guarded by a pair of Monitors. Their mechanisms

seemed different from those which, down below, had overseen the Line

- and different from those Kimo Ani had glimpsed as they patrolled the

Higher Levels. Their claws were massive and their eyes burned with a

light that made the fear Kimo Ani had felt even thus far pale by

comparison. Kimo Ani crept behind one of the ducts projecting from

the tunnel wall and curled up, making himself as small and quiet as

possible while he wondered what to do.

' *Here we go again,*' said the voice from the Talisman loudly.  
' *I've had*

*just about enough of this. Are you a man or a mouse, boy?* '

Kimo Ani had no idea what a *mouse* was, but he was too busy with

other concerns to wonder about it. He desperately clamped his mouth

shut as it tried to gibber of its own accord and clutched the Talisman

harder, trying to squeeze it into silence.

It responded by emitting an ear-piercing shriek. ' *OI! YOU!* ' it

shouted, in a voice that seemed impossibly loud for one so small. ' *YES,*

*YOU! CHUNKY AND CLANKY OVER THERE! GOT*

*SOMETHING NICE OVER HERE, JUST FOR YOU!*'

'*Now you just wait until they get a leetle bit closer. .*' it said to Kimo Ani in

softer, almost conversational tones. '*Wait until they're almost on us, wait*

*until I tel you - and then you run, ok?'*

'So let me get this straight,' Peri said. 'Time Lords, World Meddlers,

Eternal Guardians, spectres, ghoulies and a lot of the things that

prehistoric people thought of as gods operate on or are merely the

visible projections of entities that exist in other *continua* than the four-

dimensional *continuum* of Minkowski space. .'

'That's a gross oversimplification,' said the Doctor, 'but generally

correct.'

'. .but the so-called four-dimensional continuum of Minkowski space

is actually comprised of *ten* dimensions. .'

'At the very least.'

'. .the extra six of them spitting off from the other four a fraction of

a second after the Big Bang. .'

'Spot on,' said the Doctor. 'I've always thought of them - if we take

the cyclical view of Time - as the triggering mechanism of the universe

as a whole. When the universe collapses back into the singularity of the

Gnab Gib - or the Big Crunch, if you prefer - their reunification with

space/time as we know it will trigger off a whole new cycle. Until then,

basically they're just hanging around as an anomaly roughly one

thousandth of the size of a proton. Could be anywhere. Now where

was it? I'm sure I had it somewhere. .'

To her growing horror, Peri realised that the Time Lord was absently patting his pockets.

'You're going to tell me that you've got it on you somewhere,' she

said, 'aren't you?'

'What?' The Doctor, still searching through his patchwork coat,

raised his eyebrows in surprise. 'Of course not. That would be

completely and utterly ridiculous. If I'd had it *on* me somewhere then

we wouldn't have had to come here and.. aha!' He finally unearthed the

object of his search: a small and battered-looking *livre de poche*, its brittle

pages held together between leather-and-pasteboard covers by a

selection of stringy rubber bands. 'A small *aide-mémoire*,' he explained,

pulling off the bands and leafing gently through the fragile leaves. 'In

every incarnation, I try to keep a note of the occasional important thing

- little notes to myself. It's not as if we're all exactly the same *persons*,

after all. Hmm.. ' His voice became absent as he perused the salient

information within. 'Street map of Ultima Thule. .latitude and longitude

of El Dorado. .third door on the left past the midden and ask for

Joseph of Arimathea. . Hello, what's this. .the *Hand of Omega*?' He glared

at the page incredulously. 'There? Really? What must I have been

thinking? Oh well, *c'est la guerre*. .the Seven Crested Spires of Praxos

XIV. .Sidcup. .the Lost Constellations of the Cool Star Furies. . and

here, at last, we are. " *Cncrg addit sxthdim amly ref Mkski Sp.*" I must have

been feeling particularly terse and cursive when I wrote that.' He peered

at the entry closely and then shut the little book with with a somewhat

dusty snap. 'As I suspected, I didn't leave myself much more than a set

of temporal and spatial co-ordinates. There's some indeterminate waffle

concerning how the truth will eventually emerge, how things will be

brought to light, but that, I'm afraid, is rather it. I must admit that other

me was far more interested in making an utter fool of himself with his

penny whistle than providing explanations.'

Peri quashed the slightly unworthy thought that started with the

word *if* and continued with the word *only*. 'So how are we going to find

it? Do we just wander around and look for it or what?'

'Not a good idea,' the Doctor said. 'My eyes might be somewhat



unique, in a number of respects, but I seriously doubt their ability to

distinguish between subatomic particles unassisted. And besides - the

problem of the Pararachnids remains. There are several colonies of

them still around.'

'I thought you said they'd left only their weak and crippled behind.'

Peri had been slightly lulled by the preceding lapse into Doctorial

inconsequentiality, but was starting to feel worried again.

'Weak and crippled are relative terms. Those that remained would be

quite capable of tearing you limb from limb as soon as look at you.'

The Doctor strode towards the remains of a toppled, fluted stone

column and, mindless of the liberal coating of ash, sat down on it. 'Our

best bet, I think, is simply to wait and see what happens. Something

always does.'

Peri sighed to herself and sat down beside him. It occurred to her

that lately their lives had been too hectic simply to stop and look

around; to take things in and just generally chat about them. Seen in

that light, this could be taken as a small respite, a chance to relax and

get to know the man again; to try to find something of the man who,

before he'd changed, had been so charming in his boyish way and had

inspired trust enough to whisk her out of her existing life and into

dangers she had never imagined.

The problem was, in this oven-warm wasteland with the baleful

moon graffiti looking down upon her, she simply couldn't think of

anything to say. .

' *Hat-wearing?*' she said, eventually.

'I beg your pardon?' said the Doctor.

'Hat-wearing. When you were talking about the Pararachnids, you

said something about animals who were intelligent, tool-using and hat-

wearing. .'

'Ah, yes.' The Time Lord settled back, in a physically improbable

way that suggested he was lounging in an invisible armchair, and began

to expound. 'The wearing of hats is one of the quintessential, landmark

factors denoting abstract thought, and an intelligent adaptation to one's

environment. Any animal can take shelter from the elements operating

purely on instinct - it takes a greater, and quite specific degree of

mental sophistication and conceptualisation to hit upon the idea of

carrying said shelter *around*. Additionally, a good hat provides a vast

repository of additional information from which one can infer -

anything from the wearer's place in the social pecking order to the state

of his or her entire culture.'

The Doctor smiled to himself. 'It's no accident that those from a

decadent culture or a culture in decline can be spotted by their

increasingly ludicrous and complicated hats. I may prepare a small

monograph upon the subject for the Royal Society, for the next time

we're passing through a timeframe where the Royal Society actually

exists. .'

Further details of the hypothetical monograph, however, were never

known, because it was at this point that the Doctor was cut off in mid-

flow by a loud and polyphonic crash. Various items of ruined masonry

had fallen in upon themselves to produce a kind of makeshift ramp - or

at least, if they hadn't, then the figure clawing his desperate way out of

the hole must have been levitating on a slant.

The figure was human, but so ectomorphic that for a moment Peri

completely failed to recognise him as such. He was naked, bald and pale

to the point of albinism. As he emerged, Peri saw that he was

clutching something to his chest. It glowed through his fingers with a

kind of reddish shifting light.

The new arrival ran from the hole, looking back over his shoulder,

obviously far more concerned with what might be following him than

where he was going. This proved to be rather a mistake; his foot

tangled in something and he pitched forward, still clutching the item he

held and smashing face first into the rubble. He rose, weak and

groaning, to his knees - and caught sight of Peri and the Doctor. He

shot to his feet as though galvanised and, with a little squeak of pure

terror, ran from them into the ruins.

'Now I have no idea what that was about,' the Doctor said,

bounding to his feet in a sudden burst of energy, 'but I'd say it merits

further investigation.' He set off in a kind of deceptively rapid dogtrot

after the pale man, not bothering to see whether or not Peri was

following.

For a moment Peri hesitated, mindful of what the Time Lord had

said about the remaining Pararachnids in the wreckage. Then she heard

the sound of the things in the hole from which the pale man had come.

Mechanical, menacing and above all *approaching* things. Never mind

what might be lurking above ground, she really didn't want to face this

alone. She set off after the rapidly diminishing Doctorial form.

The general and the specific, Peri thought. The abstract and the

concrete. The difference between the two is always waiting there to trip

you up. Ruins so extensive that they became a generic landscape were

bad in themselves, but having to deal with them up close, in all their

particulars, as you clambered over them and under them, was even

worse. Shards of broken glass sliced at her bare shins,  
tangles of wire

tore at her arms. Scattered, broken personal items -  
crockery, the shreds

of clothing, things that might or might not have been toys  
for some

long-vanished child - sank hooks into her human heart and  
scored it.

There were bones, here and there, and the desiccated  
remains of

other, softer things. Nothing moved but to flap and rattle in  
the wind -

but all the while there was the unconscious, unglimped  
impression of

spindly things scuttling through the debris, waiting in the  
dark places to

catch you with a claw and pull you down, but always just out  
of sight. .

The Doctor was ahead of her - she despaired of catching him  
up but

never quite lost sight of him and even made up some  
ground. How

much of that was intentional, for all that the fact of her  
existence

seemed to have gone from his head, she couldn't say.  
Abruptly, he

stopped, and completely misjudging the distance between them, Peri

almost ran straight into him.

They were on the lip of a shallow incline of loose shale that dipped

into what was more or less the wreckscape equivalent of a clearing. At

its bottom, the pale man had weakly half-collapsed. He seemed little

more than a boy, his skin withered and puckered by chronic malnutrition. Peri saw a collection of ulcerated wounds on his arms,

reminiscent of hypodermic track marks but more severe. The boy had

obviously been on some kind of multiple, heavy-bore intravenous drip,

she thought, for quite some time - maybe even for all his life.

This close, it was possible to make out the object the boy clutched

so protectively to him in more detail: a convex disc slightly bigger than

a human palm, made of some mirror-bright and faintly golden metal.



From it, though it was impossible to be sure, there seemed to project a

series of slim and swept-back lateral fins, as though a three-dimensional

representation of a child's drawing of the sun had been given a spin.

'Not a particularly prepossessing sort of chap, is he?' said the

Doctor. 'Decidedly on the peaky side, I'd say.' He began to slither down

the scree. 'You there!' he called to the boy, in the kind of

condescending tone that had in the past - and in the future, for that

matter - had heavily armed representatives of any local authority

wanting to shoot him on sight, 'Stay where you are. I want to talk to

you.'

The boy backed away from him with a fear that, Peri thought, was

probably innate: almost anything approaching would have provoked it.

With a look of desperation, he hurled the object he was carrying

directly at the Doctor's head. The Doctor ducked, and the disc

continued under its own momentum to land by Peri's feet.

' *Ow,*' it said.

Peri bent and picked it up. It was strangely warm to the touch - or

rather, it did not feel quite as cold as the cold metal she had been

expecting. It pulsed very gently in a way that seemed almost organic.

'Are you alive?' she said, vaguely unsure if she were actually speaking

to the thing or musing to herself.

' *Of course we're alive,*' it snapped. ' *Though probably not in the way you seem*

*to think. We're a ship full of several hundred thousand of what you might call a*

*race of intelligent bacteria. We, on the other hand, call ourselves the Wibliwee.'*

'Um.. ' Peri's astonishment was such that, even years later, she would

recall what she said next as probably the dumbest and most stupid thing

she had ever said. 'You speak, uh, human very well.'

*' There's several hundred thousand of us,'* said the voice of the Wibliwee.

*' We're incredibly advanced and as ef ectively immortal as amoebas. Mastering the*

*common apostrophe - go on, have a guess, what do you reckon to the odds? '*

The Doctor, meanwhile, reached the pale boy, had helped him up

and was dusting him off in a friendly manner. The boy seemed slightly

mollified, now it was clear that the Time Lord didn't actively mean to

attack him, but he remained cautious. Peri, with the muttering Wibliwee

ship in her hand, was about to head down into the hollow when

something reared up from the other side. Three somethings, each with

entirely too many legs, antennae and the ragged flaps of atrophied

wings for comfort.

'Doctor!' she cried as the shadows of the Pararachnids fell over him

and the boy - but he had already shot into action, pushing the boy

behind him and glaring up at the advancing insectoid monsters as if his

gaze might form a barrier in itself.

'Get away from here, Peri,' he called over his shoulder. 'Get back to

the TARDIS and wait for me there.'

Peri stood rooted to the spot, torn between concern and panic.

'What are you waiting for?' the Doctor snapped. 'I'll have quite

enough to do looking out for this chap here - and the last thing I need

is to have to worry about you as well. Now get a move on!'

Kimo Ani looked up at the. .things looming over himself and the

impossibly big, healthy-looking and brightly coloured man, reaching for

them with snapping, jagged claws - and a long-suppressed memory

flared inside him. It was a real thing, not an image from some

subliminally imposed edu-stream. It was a memory of being very, very

small. A memory from before he had been sent into the tunnels to take

his place on the Line. A memory of these. . *things* tearing through a

world he had thought of as being utterly safe, inviolate, because it was

the only world he knew.

He finally realised, then, that this was one of the monsters of which

he had *truly* been afraid, afraid of all his waking life - and that he had

somehow, in some complicated way he could not fully work out,

confused them with the Monitors in the tunnels down below. The fear

that had so debilitated him, ever since the voice inside his head had

woken him up and turned into the glowing Talisman, had been directed

at almost completely the wrong thing.

'Steady up, young chap,' said the big bright man. Kimo Ani was

aware that the actual noises coming out of his mouth were nonsense,

but he could understand them all the same. 'I'll get you out of this,

never fear.'

Another memory surfaced. Kimo Ani remembered how some of the

grown-up people had acted when the monsters came. Vaguely, he

expected the big bright man to pull out his gun and start shouting at

and shooting the monsters any moment now.

He was therefore a little taken aback when the big bright man stuck

his hands up in the air and said to the monsters, 'I surrender abjectly,

and so does my young friend. Take us to your, if you'll pardon the

unconscionable lapse into the profoundly trite, leader or nearest

applicable equivalent.'

Peri headed back the way they had come, maintaining a kind of fearful

and precarious balance between speed of escape from the things behind

her and an awareness that her surroundings themselves were potentially

lethal. It would just be stupid if, in getting away from ten-foot-tall, ten-

legged quasi-spiders, she tripped in the dark and drove a rusty nail or

something into her head.

' *Where do you think you're going?* ' the voice of the Wibliwee said. ' *Take*

*us back right this instant!* '

The voice had her glancing at her hand at the faintly glowing thing.

What with other things on her mind, she'd forgotten that she still had

it. The voice also wrenched her mind away from something else that

was vaguely worrying her - something she couldn't quite pin down. It

wasn't worry for the Doctor - he'd said that he was capable of looking

out for himself and for the pale boy, and she implicitly believed him. It

was something to do with the boy himself, something about the fact

that, when they had first seen him, emerging from the hole, he had

been obviously running *from* something. .

Lights came on with a crash. They were like headlamps, the beam

they cast designed to be viewed from behind their source.  
From the

other side they dazzled rather than illuminated; Peri blinked  
and shook

her head as purple flares detonated and swirled across her  
vision.

Two bulky objects were waiting for her. One of them moved  
forward with the clunk and hiss of hydraulics, and Peri  
squinted to

make out the form behind its blazing lights. She more or less  
instantly

wished that she hadn't.

It was clearly robotic, though some of the masses attached  
to its

metal frame seemed to have been sculpted from a fungus-  
like material -

some kind of semi-organic artificial flesh? It had a pair of  
massive,

blocky-looking arms, giving it the overall impression of a  
hand-built

gorilla - but no gorilla ever born had a head like this one. It  
was like

some sort of claw hammer, from which the headlights ran on  
lateral



struts. The front, flat end that in a hammer hits the nails was of wire

mesh. It was just possible to see the indications of complex machinery

within, though whether this was its sensors or robotic brain it was

impossible to say.

' *Oh, damn,*' said the voice of the Wibliwee, with a kind of resigned

anger at something it was patently not going to be able to change. ' *Here*

*we go again.*'

The robotic thing advanced across the wreckage on cantilevered

caterpillar treads faster than Peri could back off. When it was within an

inch of grasping her with its mechanical claws, or smacking at her with

its claw-hammer head, it stopped. Peri had the impression that, so far

as a robotic mechanism can be imbued with human impulse and

response, it was peering at her dubiously.

'You are Biological Unit One Seven Nine Zero Seven Four One,' it

said, in a voice that seemed surprisingly well-modulated and not at all

mechanical - save that it was quite obviously generated and pieced

together from sound-samples of discrete and complete words.

'Biological Unit One Seven Nine Zero Seven Four One Shall Come

With These Monitor Units Immediately.'

Hurtful little Doctorial jibes about the American usage of the English language had taken their toll, and Peri noticed the 'Shall'. The

machine was not making a request or even, precisely, giving an order. It

was simply stating how things were, and how they were going to be.

'I'm not your Biological Unit,' Peri said, with a bravado she didn't

quite feel in the face of this overwhelming mechanical certainty. So far

as she knew, she *might* have been this Biological Unit One Seven Nine

Zero Seven Four One for years and never known it.

The machine appeared to consider this - calculating and compiling a

response by way of complex but quite specific algorithms that had it

pausing for a moment. Any attempt to characterise its state as

puzzlement or the like would have been complete and utter anthropomorphic nonsense.

'This Is An Impossible Statement,' it said at last. 'All Other Biological Units Are Accounted For. You Are Biological. You Are

Biological Unit One Seven Nine Zero Seven Four One.'

'No, I'm not,' said Peri.

'If Biological Unit Is Not Biological Unit One Seven Nine Zero Seven Four One Then It Is Hostile Biological Unit.' A series of notched and ancient, but still lethally sharp, blades extended from their

housings in the machine's claws with a concussive and multiple

electromagnetic *clunk*.

'I mean I am,' said Peri hurriedly. 'Biological Unit One Seven Nine

whatever it is. That's me. How could I be anybody else?'

The blades retracted - although, Peri thought, they didn't retract

quite as swiftly as they had extended. The machine raised its claw and

fired something directly at her head. It lashed aside before she could

even begin to react and wrapped itself around her throat: a thin tentacle

of tensile steel, restraining her like a leash restrains a dog.

'Biological Unit One Seven Nine Zero Seven Four One Shall Come

With These Monitor Units Immediately,' the machine repeated.

In the relatively short time since the Talisman had woken Kimo Ani up

he had, if not exactly learned new things, experienced things which had

left their mark. This had made him strangely bigger inside, able to put

things together and compare them. It made him feel - he groped for

words to define it - it made him feel more like a Real Person. He was

able to make himself move through the world, and effect it, and be

affected by it.

That was before the present circumstances, naturally.

After the fat man had surrendered (and the Real Person in Kimo

Ani was starting to wonder if the fat man was *really* fat, or just fatter

than him) the pair of them had been marched off through the wreckage

by the monsters (who, Kimo Ani remembered, were called Pararachnids, without quite knowing how he knew the name) to a place

where there were more of them. More than as many as his fingers plus

his toes, which was thus far as many as Kimo Ani could count

(although he had the vague but steadily growing idea that things didn't

necessarily *have* to be the same number as other things to which one

could physically point).

The Pararachnids lived in makeshift shelters seemingly constructed

of things from the surrounding ruins - sheets of thin stuff piled against

and on top of other things stuck in the ground. Kimo Ani remembered

the tunnels that held the Line and the other things in them and felt an

obscure sense of pride. His senses of proportion and self were still

stunted, but he could see that those things had been in some sense

made *better* than the things made by the Pararachnids.

In this cobbled-together Pararachnid village, he and the big man - he

and the *Doctor* - had been brought before a creature larger than the

others, its limbs so huge and bulky that it was unable to walk. The

Breeder Male, the Doctor had told Kimo Ani out of the corner of his

mouth. You could tell the Breeder Male, apparently, because it was only

good for hitting things and grunting.

The Breeder Male had looked Kimo Ani and the Doctor over with

horrible segmented eyes on extensible stalks, then had uttered a sound

similar to a belch but as loud as a bellow and lashed out at a swarm of

smaller creatures, who had crawled all over Kimo Ani and the Doctor,

leaving behind them strands of a kind of sticky substance which had

solidified to cocoon them from their knees to their shoulders. Kimo

Ani and the Doctor had then been taken away to a large hut and left to

hang from one of the mismatched joists that after a fashion supported

its roof.

Strewn across the floor were items that Kimo Ani failed to

recognise. The Doctor had explained that they were canisters

containing various condiments used for the seasoning of food,

scavenged from the ruins. The Pararachnids, so he said, were noted for

adopting certain of their victims' customs and pleasures, just so long as

it didn't involve any creative effort on their part. If he was any judge,

he had said, reading from the visible labels, they were just going to

sprinkle Kimo Ani and himself with pepper and salt and eat them raw.

They had been here for some while now. Kimo Ani's sense of the

passage of time had been stunted, as his other senses, by his years spent

on the Line, but he was aware that his crippling fear had subsided into a

kind of feeling that itched inside his head and stomach for something,

almost anything, to happen.

Hanging beside him, the Doctor seemed to know what he was

feeling. 'Won't be long now,' he said, with a cheerfulness that even

Kimo Ani could see was utterly wrong for their situation. 'We're only

waiting until I'm quite sure Peri's perfectly safe and back at the

TARDIS.'

Kimo Ani hazarded a guess that a Peri was the female who had been

with the Doctor when he had caught him. 'What's a TARDIS?' he



asked. It only occurred to him later that this was the first thing he had

said to the Doctor - the first thing he had said to anyone - since

awakening. The first thing that hadn't been just a fearful squeak to the

Talisman, anyway.

The Doctor appeared to consider this deeply, nodding thoughtfully

to himself. Then he shook his head. 'It can take years to convey the old

girl even in her smallest aspect. Years we don't have to spare. In fact, I

rather think it's time to make our dramatic escape.' He became

conspiratorial. 'Now there's a trick I learned from a man named

Houdini. When someone ties you up or something like that, you tense

your muscles to make them bigger. .' He began to wriggle around inside

his Pararachnid silk half-cocoon, and then his face fell and he stopped.

'Of course, it does help if you're occupying a body that could *then*

dislocate its own shoulder. Oh, dear. It appears that we're really stuck.

Sorry.'

This was Kimo Ani's day for new emotions. He couldn't put a name

to the one he now felt, but he sighed and found himself wanting to say

the word 'typical'.

It was then that a medium-sized Pararachnid entered the hut.

'Medium-sized' in this case meant that it was merely twice the size of

both Kimo Ani and the Doctor combined. It seemed quite elderly:

Kimo Ani could see that a number of its limbs had gone over the years.

It scuttled about, picking up the occasional canister and tossing it aside,

as though looking for something the use of which it did not quite

understand.

The Doctor stared at it slyly for a moment and then said, sharply,

'No, no, no! That's not the way to go about it at all.'

The Pararachnid turned to face him and chittered belligerently.

'You might very well say that,' said the Doctor, 'but I happen to

know your Breeder Male very well, and I can tell you for a fact that he's

extremely particular about what he'll pop into his mouth. If you put

some of those things down there on us, he wouldn't like it at all. No

doubt kill you on the spot.'

Despite itself, the Pararachnid seemed to consider this. It turned

back to the partially cocooned Doctor and chittered suspiciously.

'Of course I know what I'm talking about,' said the Doctor with a

slightly affronted air. It can do no harm at this point to reveal that I

myself have worn a chef's hat in my time and know exactly what I'm

talking about. Tell you what, why don't you just let me down and I

could lend you a hand? I'm sure that a Pararachnid of your obvious

quality and experience could stop me escaping and doing anything

dangerous. Nice occipital markings, by the way. Very fetching.'

More chittering from the Pararachnid party.

'What do you mean, what's in it for me?' said the Doctor. 'As you

can plainly see, I am a stupid bipedal hominid and well known for

doing stupid things. This is one of the stupid things us stupid bipedal

hominids do. Don't you even know that? I'm sorry, what was I thinking,

of course you know that. .

'My word, it's the secretions of that particular gland that dissolve the

webbing, is it? We learn something new every day, some of us. Except,

of course, for those of us who don't. Now, if you could free my legs

and hands completely, it would make things easier for all concerned.

Thank you. Now, let's see what you have here. Rosemary's nice with

lamb, but on a stupid bipedal hominid it can be rather tart.  
Salt, pepper,

all good stuff, but we're looking for something a little more  
piquant and

out of the ordinary. Turmeric, quite possibly, but I'd advise  
you to go

easy with it. Saffron, to be perfectly frank, does nothing  
worth the

effort of having to clean the stains off your mandibles  
afterwards. Aha!

An industrial-sized can of Extra Strong Cayenne Pepper. Just  
the chap

we're looking for. Now, if you'll just come over here and have  
a look,

I'll show you precisely what I mean. .'

Little metallic things scuttled out of their way as the robotic  
Monitors

led Peri down through white-walled tunnels. The tensile steel  
around

her neck was not painfully tight, but held her with a firm  
pressure that

made her constantly want to gag. They travelled at what  
would, in other

circumstances, possibly be called a comfortable walking  
pace. Peri was

almost completely sure that, if she were to stumble, the machines

would stop and allow her to recover, rather than simply moving on and

dragging her. Almost certainly.

' *We lost our reaction core by accident,*' said the voice of the Wibliwee. Peri

found herself listening to it carefully - not so much out of interest but

because concentrating on it helped to take her mind from her situation.

' *The actual details of the accident aren't important, but suffice to say that there is*

*now a small colony of Wibliwee mutineers on one of the smaller asteroids of your*

*solar system. The processes that drive our ship are unique, and the loss of the core*

*severely crippled us. . '*

A nasty thought occurred to Peri. 'This drive core,' she said,

intensely aware of the queasy not-quite-pain the act of speaking caused

to her constricted throat, 'it wouldn't involve some kind of six-

dimensional anomaly, would it?'

The voice of the Wibliwee snorted. ' *What do you take us for? How could*

*you power an entire ship with a space/time event less than a thousandth of a proton*

*across? That would be total y stupid. We use that as the basis for our navigation*

*device.'*

'Silly me,' said Peri, 'I should have guessed.'

*'It operates upon entirely different terms, demonstrates entirely different*

*properties, from the "up", "down", "strange", "charmed" and so on that are demonstrated by common subatomic particles. On its own terms, the universe is in*

*an absolutely literal sense, Everywhere Else, and we're able to extract meaningful*

*positional data from its reactions. Our navigation unit quantifies the balance of its*

*elements of jumpiness, fishiness, chubbiness and flutiness, and extrapolates them to a*

*macrocosmic model. The end result is an absolutely solid space/time fix in terms of*

*the galactic spin.'*

The voice of the Wibliwee stopped smugly, no doubt waiting for

Peri's reaction to the complete idiocy of a large part of its explanation.

Long exposure to similar explanations by the Doctor of the inner

workings of the TARDIS, however, meant that she was made of sterner

stuff than that.

'So you lost your drive core,' she said. 'What happened then? How

did you end up here?'

' *We managed to limp to this planet on emergency power,*' the voice of the

Wibbly said with a tinge of disappointment. ' *We needed several trace*

*elements in their refined state - chromium, tellurium, molybdenum and the like - and*

*the Earth was the nearest post-industrial society. Just our luck that we hit it in the*

*middle of the evacuation. We didn't have the power left for sustained flight, and in*

*the confusion, due to a set of circumstances only really interesting to us because we*

*were involved in them, we ended up down here. In the Line. And we've been stuck*

*here ever since.'*



'Couldn't you have smashed your way out or something?'  
Peri asked.

*' Force to mass ratio,' said the voice of the Wibliwee. ' With a  
ful y*

*functional drive and enough velocity to go irrational, such  
things don't matter - but*

*with the sort of run-up we'd get on the tungsten doors they  
have here, we'd merely*

*splatter ourselves over them. Besides, we've barely got  
enough power left to keep our*

*communications going. We're actual y using inductive  
resonance to fire off the*

*synaptic signals ordinarily caused by your eardrums  
vibrating. With a few minor*

*modifications, that's what we used to wake up that boy from  
the Line and get him*

*to find us and pick us up - after about seven of your  
decades, we might add.'*

'The Line. .' Peri said. 'You keep mentioning this Line. What  
is it?'

'You don't want to know,' said the voice of the Wibliwee  
gloomily.

*' Believe us, you don't want to know. Problem is, you're  
going to find out right about*

*now. '*

The automata had reached the bottom of a spiral incline,  
and now

took Peri and her new-found friends through a dark portal.  
The

difference in light-levels from the access corridors to the  
caverns

leading off was so marked that, for a moment, it was like  
stepping into

the dark. It took some moments for her eyes to adjust.

And then they did.

Only later, much later, when her mind did not simply and  
instantly

shy away in terror and revulsion, did Peri recall the details of  
the Line -

the membranous, supportive coverings, the  
servomechanisms, the

nutrient tubes, the hordes of robotic units of various designs  
that

ministered to the semi-living livestock. You could hardly call  
the things

that the livestock had become *human*, after all..

At the time, in that instant when she first saw it and felt the  
full

impact of what it meant, all she could take in was the vast

switchbacking layout of the conveyor belts, the faceless,  
vaguely,

human figures that hung above them from hooks, trudging  
slowly and

in unison - a halting, slow-motion parade without beginning  
or end and

leading nowhere.

Peri thought she had experienced terror before - at the knife  
point

of a mugger outside the college dorm, under the lambent  
psycho-

transforming rays on a medical bench in the Varos prison  
complex, at

the claws and jaws and slimy tentacles of any number of  
hideous and

villainous monsters as she was hurled erratically from one  
end of space

and time to another. Now she knew she had been wrong - in  
the same

way that one might imagine what a broken bone feels like,  
before one

feels the smack of impact hard enough to break bone and  
the shattered

pain that fills the world. That was when she panicked, tried  
to fight in

vain against the steel that held her.

' *Ah, wel* , ' she was peripherally aware of the voice of the Wibliwee

saying. ' *Here we go again. If the power holds out we'll see you in seventy-odd of*

*your years.*'

The predawn sun was spreading its nimbus across the skyline of the

ruins when a gasping and utterly exhausted Kimo Ani reached a tall and

bluish box, recognised it as one of the first things he'd seen when

emerging from the tunnels of the Line and let out a kind of hysterical

cross between a sob and a groan. After everything that had happened,

he was merely back where he had started.

The Doctor, on the other hand, did not seem out of breath in the

slightest, for all he had spent their flight from the Pararachnid camp

running ahead, looking back and exhorting Kimo Ani to hurry up. The

Doctor was, however, peering up at the box worriedly.

'Peri doesn't seem to be around,' he said. 'The TARDIS beacon

would be on if she were occupied. Where could she have got to? It's

not as if there's an actual plethora of places she can go. . '

Kimo Ani gestured in the direction of the tunnels. 'Down there. In

the Line. I think the Monitors have her now.'

The Doctor nodded to himself, as though certain things previously

obfuscated had at last become clear. 'Why don't you tell me all about it?

' He glanced back the way they had come. 'But not here. The

Pararachnids are slow to anger and react, but the momentum they can

build up when they do is quite astonishing.'

He produced a small, bright sliver of metal and stuck it in the side

of the box. A door swung open and lights blazed from within. 'Come

inside,' said the Doctor, 'and prepare yourself for a bit of a surprise.'

As it turned out, the Doctor's warning was unnecessary. Kimo Ani

was quite at home with the idea of small holes leading into vast and

complex spaces. The fact that this particular one was vertical, with

nothing around it to *contain* those spaces, was just an incidental detail.

And a few minutes later, when almost a thousand enraged (and in some

cases still slightly peppery) Pararachnids reached the place where the

TARDIS had once stood, all that remained were the vestigial traces of

its outer plasmic shell, dissipated during dematerialisation and wafting

gently in the breeze.

A Pararachnid's primary sense is that of smell - indeed, this had

been the main factor in the success of Kimo Ani and the Doctor in

their flight from the Pararachnid camp. It had also been the main factor

in the Pararachnids, once alerted to the escape, being able to follow.

Now the thread of scent had been snapped.

However, as they cast around in angry confusion, they caught the

fainter, older scent of one of those they had been pursuing.

They followed it back.

And they found from where it had come.

Without an overall, overriding control, the robotic mechanisms that

Kimo Ani had known as Monitors were forced to rely upon their own

inbuilt programming - and this programming contained an inbuilt,

fundamental flaw. Quite simply, they had been built to protect human

beings from Pararachnids, and the default state of that was to prevent

human beings leaving the caverns of the Line and going where it might

be dangerous. Preventing Pararachnids from coming *in* required the

secondary control systems that were no longer operational. They were

quite simply, in the literal and figurative senses, looking entirely the

other way.

Thus it was that, as almost a thousand Pararachnids piled in through

the gate and boiled down through the tunnels, coming across

supposedly protective robotic devices in their thousands, they were met

with not even the slightest resistance.

The TARDIS rematerialised, and Kimo Ani and the Doctor stepped

out. The Doctor looked about him in the light from the TARDIS door

at the hanging bodies, the conveyor belts, the endless introverted

mechanism of the Line.

'It's just a variation upon the theme of suspended animation,' he

mused sadly. 'The metabolism is slowed, the bodies are kept minimally

active to prevent such deterioration as is possible. What is it about the

human mind that thinks the only way to extend life is to attenuate it, to

chill it and extrude it?' He seemed to remember that Kimo Ani existed.

'Are you perfectly all right?'



The fear was back with a vengeance in Kimo Ani; so big that he

couldn't feel it properly. He could sense the razor-edges of it around

him, and somehow thought that if he could only hold himself in and

keep very still, his skin would do no more than brush it.

'The monsters came,' he managed to say at last. 'They came very

fast. Other people went and there were no more ships, so we had to

come down here.'

'There is that, I suppose,' said the Doctor. 'And the main problem

was that all of this had to be done on short notice. All it took was for a

couple of key systems to fail, and these people just kept marching on,

long after the main body of the Pararachnid swarm had gone. Marching

on for centuries.'

Abruptly he turned and took Kimo Ani by the shoulders. Kimo Ani

felt that his body might shatter like glass from the shock, and was

surprised in a remote kind of way when it didn't.

'I know you don't like being here,' the Doctor told him. 'And I'm

sorry that it's going to get worse. If my friend Peri's been taken into the

Line, then there's only one place she can possibly be. I want you to take

me there. Can you do that?'

Possibly it was the simple prospect of doing *something*, of moving

through the world again, even if the direction in which one moved was

back to the last place one ever wanted to go, but Kimo Ani felt the fear

move from him. He nodded. 'I can take you there.'

They moved through the Line. The bodies and the belts were almost entirely similar, but Kimo Ani found that, in a way he could not

express, certain areas and directions were familiar and others not. Even

so, it took them quite some time to find the place he had once occupied

on the Line.

The woman hung there, wrapped in a pristine polymerised sac

which had not had the time to build up stains from within like those

around her. You could see the tubes in her arm, the eyes rolled up in

the head and the loosely yawning mouth from which saliva had been

pumping before a slowed metabolism had shut down the glands.

Lying on the floor beside the belt she trod, dropped from her hand

and subsequently overlooked by the mechanisms that had installed her

here, was the Talisman. It was speaking to itself - although speaking

might not be the proper word. It was arguing amongst itself in a

thousand tinny little voices.

' *Al right!*' a louder, more authoritative voice cut through the hubbub. ' *I know we've done it al before, and we're al of us sick to death of it,*

*but we're gonna have to do it al again. You know why? 'Cause if we don't we're*

*gonna be stuck here for al eternity and then some. '*

The hubbub from the Talisman trailed off into a high-pitched muttering and then ceased.

' *OK,*' said the single voice. ' *Al together, count of three and follow my lead.*

*One. Two. Three. . . '*

'Excuse me,' said the Doctor, picking the Talisman up. 'I'm the

Doctor, and these are my friends Kimo Ani and a slightly but, in all

hope, temporarily inconvenienced Peri. I wonder if you can help us.

' *What?*' the Talisman said, in full chorus. It was as though all the

other voices, once ordered to follow their leader's, as it were, lead,

would continue to do so until further notice.

'Do try to keep up,' said the Doctor a little tetchily. 'We're never

going to get anywhere if you keep failing to pick up on what's already

been said. Now, I gather from what Kimo Ani has said that you've been

down here as long as he was, if not longer, and that you've been aware

of things for all of that time. Is there a control nexus in this place? Is

there some way we can help our friend?'

The Talisman was silent for a moment. ' *There might be a place,* ' it said

at last. '*We saw it on our scanners just before the drive-power finally went and we*

*hit the ground. . '*

'Splendid!' the Doctor said happily. 'Now if you'll just tell us the way

then we can -'

There was an explosion of steel from one end of the cavern as an

access door ruptured. Through it, scrabbling and clawing at each other

in their rush through this bottleneck and then fanning out, came the

Pararachnids.

The Pararachnids, by way of their alien metabolic processes, could

subsist perfectly well for centuries between meals, but even so there was

little to beat walking into a room to find the most sumptuous banquet

imaginable. The hierarchical processes of Pararachnid society should

have had them carefully selecting the choicest victims, and taking them

back for the Breeder Male to feed upon before even thinking about their

own modest requirements.

The hierarchical processes of Pararachnid society, however, with all

this bounty spread before them, could quite frankly stuff it - and the

invading Pararachnids now proceeded to stuff themselves in nothing

short of a feeding frenzy.

For the rest of his life, Kimo Ani would never forget the sounds he

heard behind him. He tried to pull away from the Doctor's grip. 'I must

help them. I must. .'

'And that's precisely what we're going to do,' said the Doctor, half-

dragging him down the transom of the Line, heading off and at an

angle from the gustatory chaos. 'If you went back there and tried to

fight them you would simply die - and that wouldn't help anybody. This

is the only intelligent course of action we can follow - and the

occasional flash of abstract intelligence, harnessed to the greater good,

is one of the few reasons for having human beings in the galaxy at all.'

He glanced down at the Talisman in his hand. 'How far now?'

*' Just up here then to the left, then right and up and to the left again. . '*

At last they came to a point where mechanisms, conduits and

cabling converged: a large console in the shape of a metallic doughnut,

in the centre of which, a circlet of electrodes attached to his scalp, sat a

partially mummified dead man.

'The conditions here prevented decay to a certain extent,' said the

Doctor, examining the body. 'He must have been left as a controller,

ready to shut things down when the danger had passed, and then died

of heart failure or something similar - not as unlikely an occurrence as it

might at first seem. Positions like that are by their very nature

incredibly stressful and debilitating. The number of times I've had to

deal with dead men falling on the dead man's handle, or stopping the

people in charge of The Button from actually pushing it. .' He seemed

to recall that this was not the right time for wandering off in

reminiscence. 'Well, be that as it may, I think it's time we took control

of this whole show and brought it to an end.' He reached over the

console to pull the electrodes from the dead man's head.

'No.'

The Doctor turned. 'I beg your pardon?'

'No,' Kimo Ani said again. The conflicting impulses, thoughts and

emotions in his head seemed to have forced themselves together into a

single lump - a lump that was, in some sense, bigger than his head and



bigger than the entire world. It was everything out there and everything

inside him, looking out at everything from behind his eyes. It was too

big to ever possibly comprehend. All you could do was live it.

'These are my people,' Kimo Ani told the Doctor, taking the circlet

of electrodes from his hands. 'This is my place. I have to do this thing.'

And the Line stopped.

The first thing that the invading Pararachnids knew of it was when

the conveyor belts, every single one of them, juddered to a halt, and the

nutrients fed to the livestock via tubes were replaced by stimulants. So

far as the Pararachnids were concerned, the only real difference was in

the colour of the liquids gushing from the broken tubes of the already

eaten, and the fact that those they were about to eat moved a little

differently, were just that little bit warmer and tasted of slightly

different things.

That was, of course, before several crash-hatches racked themselves

back around an entire quadrant of the cavern wall, and from them shot

more than a thousand Monitor units, each fully armed, their programming switched to deal with Pararachnids actually in their midst.

It was later.

Peri stood in the doorway of the TARDIS watching the stream of

pale, dazed figures shuffling by - part of a line that now wound up

through the tunnels and emerged into the wreckage, there to spread out

and populate it, to put things right - or to try, anyway. There were still

Pararachnids and other dangers out there, the Doctor had said, and

many would die. But at least, before they died, they would have a

chance to live their lives on their own terms.

Peri fingered the marks on her arm where the nutrient mechanisms

of the line had been plugged in. Now that the TARDIS seemed to be

operating normally again - whatever *that* ultimately meant - she was

going to have to check in to its medical facilities and see if they couldn't

remove the scars.

The Wibliwee had already departed, taking with them a collection of

rare elements in total roughly the size of a pinhead from a storage room

the size of a warehouse. Before leaving, they had spent twenty minutes

by the TARDIS console, hooked to it by archaic-looking coiled wires

and crocodile clips. They and the Doctor had then pronounced the

TARDIS recalibrated - although Peri herself could see no actual change

in its workings at all. It occurred to her that for far too long now she

had been taking people's word for things rather than finding out for

herself. There again, though, she supposed she'd find out for herself

soon enough, when she tried to get the TARDIS to do something and

it didn't all blow up in her face.

What it came down to in the end, she decided, was finding out

whose word you could actually trust.

Peri turned from the door and heard it shut smoothly behind her.

The console room was a mess from the recent tinkering. She picked up

the arcane tools and dropped them in their bag, which she then took to

one of the nearby storerooms. Incredibly, it was exactly where she had

thought it would be.

Leaving the storeroom, she felt a familiar crawl and wrench in the

pit of her stomach that denoted a dematerialisation. On her way back

to the console, she stuck her head into the kitchens just to be sure.

They had been completely restored, with no trace anywhere of a steam-

and-clockwork-operated, smoke-belching *thing*.

She returned to the console room to find the Doctor in his shirtsleeves, wiping his hands with an oily rag (the console room was

spotless; whatever technology the TARDIS operated upon, Peri very

much doubted engine oil was needed). He was gazing happily at the

healthily rotating time rotor with the general and slightly smug air of a

job well done.

'Sound as a pig-iron guinea,' he said, 'to quote some remarkably

famous human personage, the name of whom I shall recall in a

moment. Always assuming I actually met him in the first place. My

memory could be playing tricks on me or I could, not to put too fine a

point upon it, be lying like a four-poster bed.'

'Well, *you* seem to be back on form at any rate,' said Peri.

'These little breaks do us all a world of good, and leave us ready and

renewed for the fray,' said the Doctor, beaming.

'A little break?' said Peri sharply. 'It was hardly relaxing, and I can't

help thinking that we really didn't do any good. Shouldn't we have at

least stayed to help that Kimo Ani guy? He's the only one with the

pencils in his case sharpened, and now he's got to look after a million-

odd reawakened people.'

'We've already done more than we should,' the Doctor told her. 'I

don't *think* we did any ultimate harm - but I know for a fact that any

more and we would. Sometimes you have to touch things lightly and

move on, and hope that there are enough people alive at the end of it

all to clean up the mess' For a moment he seemed pensive - and then,

suddenly and sunnily, he smiled. He gestured to the console. 'At least

with the old girl working properly again, from now on things can hardly

go wrong.'

And later still, in the terms of the predominantly four-dimensional

space the TARDIS had just left, as their six-dimensionally navigated

ship passed the orbit of Pluto, building up enough momentum to go

irrational, Captain XiiXwiiB of the Wibliwee lounged thoughtfully in

what, for the sake of argument, we will call his chair.

He was feeling a little out of sorts. An intangible sense of responsibility nagged at his mind. As he understood it, something the

Wibliwee were going to do or say in the future - or had done and said

in the past - would end up in the Doctor's little pocket book and thus

lead him and his companion to the right place at the right time. It was a

discrete causal event, the Time Lord had explained, a singularity in the

temporal flow, and as such it was an absolute certainty that it did or

would happen. The Wibliwee wouldn't have to actually *do* anything

about it either way. It was the uncertainty of it, the fact that one had no

idea what this thing was, that preyed on the mind.

But it wasn't important. What was important was the fact that the

Wibliwee now had power for a thousand years, in return for nothing

more than supplying the corrections for the computers in those

people's time machine. It had been rather odd. Quite apart from all the

other errors, there had been such a fundamental flaw in the thing that

Captain XiiXwiiB had wondered how it could ever have operated in the

first place. Of course, the Wibliwee had corrected it,

but all the same Captain XiiXwiiB wondered how any otherwise

seemingly intelligent life form could think that thirteen divided by itself

resulted in an integer. .

One Bad Apple

by Simon Forward

'Try it, Doctor. The fruit is good.'



'Hmm?'

The Doctor, minus his coat, was busy beating the thick air with his

hat as he searched around for signs of special interest or danger.

Leela had detected few of either since their arrival. It was a mystery

to her why the Doctor had stalked so far through this dense jungle only

to stop at a place that none among her tribe would have called a

clearing. Overhead was a canopy of low branches and oddly leaning

trees, with light falling everywhere in dappled shafts - like golden rain,

she thought. Yes, the shadows of this land whispered of finer magics

than her home forest boasted. There was much to like here: the

winding routes between the richly laden trees; a knitted carpet of

vegetation to cushion every footfall; a host of different animals seen

scurrying aloft or burrowing away, scarcely visible, along channels deep

beneath the undergrowth; and sometimes the trickle of streams and

watercourses, both managing a faint sparkle even this far from the

brilliant sunshine. Everything was speckled with vibrant colour, on

steady branches or fluttering wings, and in her ears were the musical

whirrs and screeches of a flourishing jungle. The air was like warm

breath on her skin and the sweet scent of life was everywhere. The

hunting would be good and the cover was excellent. And biting into the

sweet, plump yellow fruit she had picked - Leela gave a start and shifted

uncomfortably as the Doctor suddenly registered her, his eyes gaping

with what she well knew was a guardian's anger. 'What?' she moaned.

'What have I done?'

The Doctor grabbed the fruit from her hands

'Haven't I told you before about eating things off strange trees?' he

snapped at her severely. You know, I really can't be expected to -'

'No,' Leela defied him faintly.

'Hmm?' demanded the Doctor, stopped in mid-flow.

'No, you have not told me before about -'

'Ah, yes, well.' The Doctor shrugged moodily and turned away.

Before long he was idly tossing the fruit from hand to hand, then lifting

it to his nose for an experimental sniff. Plonking his hat on his mop of

curls, he turned with a conciliatory grin to Leela and threw her the

apple for an easy catch.

'Don't let me find you've been scrumping again, he warned mischievously.

Leela smiled, then frowned in quick succession. 'Doctor, what is

scrumping?' No answer. 'And why are we here?'

'Ghosts, shadows. .probably nothing, but you never know. This

planet's sitting on the frontier of a major war.'

Suddenly, Leela hurled the fruit aside and tensed, the cryptic answer

forgotten. Crouching, she wiped the juice from her lips and listened.

The Doctor, trusting her instincts, squatted down beside her, his gaze

probing deep into the jungle.

They could both hear it now, the crash and tramp of something

huge and heavy marching along their route.

'I rather had the feeling we weren't alone here,' said the Doctor.

'Why did you not say so before?' hissed Leela, and she craned her

neck for the first glimpse of the approaching threat. Her fingers teased

the knife smoothly and silently from its sheath. Then she froze as the

Doctor clamped her arms.

'Quick thinking, Leela! You'll need that to cut us a path clear of

here.' The Doctor must have anticipated Leela's protest, because,

frustratingly, he planted a hand over her mouth. Muttering in her ear,

he added, 'These tracks we've been following had to have been beaten

down by something, don't you think?'

Leela gasped. She could see it clearly now. They were like the small

game, moving through larger burrows under the jungle canopy.

Burrows tunnelled by something big.

She nodded once to signal understanding, then, with no time to be

annoyed with herself, she scrambled quickly to the nearest wall of grass

and vines, starting to slash at it with her knife. Pulling with her free

arm, she worked to prise an opening in the curtain. The stamping,

crunching and thrashing were closing on her to her right.

Blocking them out, she yanked the opening wider and hauled herself

through on her belly. The Doctor ploughed in behind her and they

hastily beat their hideout into a sort of nest. Finally, Leela squirmed

around for a better view of the 'clearing' they had abandoned.

By the time Leela remembered the half-eaten fruit lying so obviously

outside, it was too late. She and the Doctor waited tensely for the giant

to make its entrance.

Long before the spaceship *Acolyte* had touched down, its sensors had

built a model of Paradise in one half of Colonel Joshua's brain.

Stepping on to the surface, he turned the model over, studied it from

every angle, wondering if his panoramic visor had painted it in

appropriate colours.

Still, he didn't much care - any view was preferable to that of the

ship: those hard lines were all too deeply etched in his mind.. Calling

upon his troops to kneel, he directed them in the dedication. All the

while, he dreamed of pressing an eye to the spy hole in the gateway to

Paradise, of getting the barest glimpse of Heaven. There, he knew, lay

those vital memories, the sum of his past before his conversion; murky

images tantalisingly close under refracting waters.

Beneath the murmur of his prayer, he reviewed the bricks of data

that had constructed so complete a model of this latest world his

Fusiliers had claimed:

*Ocean: H O: 96.25% Surface Area // Terrain: Archipelagos (single cluster):*

2

*3.75% Surface Area // Precip: Dense tropical rain forest separated by wide rivers*

*or channels, max height 0.5m above waterline, outer trees curve down to meet ocean,*

*forming natural domes with edges max distance 0.2km beyond island coasts. Plant*

*Life: Dense, varied. Animal Life: Dense, varied. Sentient Population: Unknown.*

No, he decided. This place could not be Paradise. The computer

model's colours were a shade too bland. Heaven described could never

have sounded so cold.

Something special lay hidden here, though. The ragged hulk of a

Cyberfrigate in orbit was testimony to that, a whole force wiped out by

*something* here. Naturally, he had set the wreck to pitch into the vast

ocean. Left in place, it was too bright a beacon to unwelcome eyes. The

discovery of this new power had to be his.

Standing, Colonel Joshua straightened the uniform cap on his head

and sealed the collar of his coat. The suit's cooling systems were already

at work. Inhaling, he crossed himself and saluted to the ranks of his

men. If prayer was the discipline of his meditations, then discipline was

the focus of his actions.

There were two targets for their immediate attention. First, a brief

signal dispatched Lieutenant Cain with a squad to investigate the as yet

colourless large rectangular box nestled under the umbrella of the



adjacent archipelago. Then he was ready himself to lead the rest of his

men to the ruins of the Cyberbase.

The shambling animal was neither as large nor as menacing as the

image its noise had conjured. Leela could see instantly that it was not

born for stealth.

The Doctor still took pains to shush her as he craned forward in

fascination. 'Something between a pangolin and an ankylosaurus,' he

murmured.

Whatever the named creatures were, Leela's own view was of a

lumbering barrel-shaped body, spiked and plated, a long flexible nose

low to the ground, four great clawed pads for feet and a casually flexing

tail tipped with its own clump of bony daggers. Sniffing as it meandered along, it detoured slightly to pass over the fruit, but gave it

no apparent pause or acknowledgement. Not even a snort of disdain.

Clearly, the offence of scrumping was not rated highly.

'Doctor, these creatures are -'

'Shush!' the Doctor silenced her again. To her utter astonishment,

the Time Lord jammed his hat down firmly and plunged into view. As

if his steps and his bright scarf were not enough, he announced his

presence with a theatrical cough. 'Excuse me! Hello there! My friend

and I are lost and we were -'

The Doctor was set to continue rambling, but the creature, which

had scarcely turned its conical head, tramped away on its set course.

Leela smiled as she too emerged from their crude hideout, taking some

satisfaction in the Doctor's disgruntled expression.

'How terribly rude,' he complained.

'Doctor, it is a beast.'

'Well, I wouldn't have put it that strongly. Probably has a lot on his

mind - things to do, places to visit, that sort of thing. Come on.'

The Doctor led her off at a run to catch up with the strange creature and even Leela found herself drawn by its unnatural lack of

curiosity. The inadequacies of her hideout had been a source of faint

shame until now. She hurried after the Doctor, feeling the extra

gravitational pull of the planet like a heavy overcoat. She was soon

confused to see him overtake their prey and doff his hat in his

gentlemanly manner. 'Hello there. As I was saying, I'm the Doctor and

this is my savage friend, Leela.'

Leela stopped running, forced to double over at the sight of the

Doctor barged aside by this single-minded creature. He scrabbled

around in comic disarray, before rising and indignantly dusting down

his rumpled coat.

'Huh! Beast!' he called after his assailant.

Leela stifled her laughter as the Doctor glanced her way, and she

trotted up beside him. 'Why do you wish to talk to the animal?'

'It's a thing with us Doctors,' he replied vaguely as he set off in

pursuit once again. 'Ah, look - it's stopped.'

They joined the mysterious animal at the base of an especially

broad-trunked tree. The bark was delicately rippled, with a mottled

sand colouring similar to the creature's armour. Lifting itself close to

the Doctor's height on its hind legs, the creature produced a pair of

tools from a pouch below its stomach.

Leela stared as it began drilling into the bark. The Doctor,

meanwhile, cleared his throat and tapped the animal on its shoulder.

When that failed to provoke a reaction, he leaned in and waved a hand

in front of its eyes.

That did the trick. The animal aimed its nose at them both and

uttered a stream of hard consonants, tongue clicks and hisses, all of

which drew a blank from the Doctor. But Leela understood every word

perfectly.

Cain, formerly Lieutenant Warner Bruch of the Imperial Marines,

summoned his squad to line up behind him, backing the transmitted

command with the habitual wave of his arm.

Abel settled down close to his shoulder, prompting a stab of remembrance.

Cain was used to that and he had any number of methods to shake

off the feeling: a rapid count to ten, a physical shrug, a short

prayer. .But only after he had taken the time to swill it around in the

glass of his mind, stirring up what remained of a fragrant bouquet.

Friendship. Memories of a sergeant who had shown him how to be an

officer. He had chosen their paired names when they had been

ordained together. Cain and Abel, because Warner had enjoyed irony,

and because who knew how the biblical Cain might have turned out if

he too had been granted a second chance.

Batting Abel's stout arm, he sent the view from his own target-

scope, highlighting the different figures. 'The Colonel will want some

prisoners, but let's take no chances.'

'Yes, sir.' Abel trained his impassive mask on the scene ahead. Cain

studied the targets, the computer supplying his mind's eye with the

details: decking the man in bizarre costume, clothing the woman in

animal hides and delivering a compositional analysis of the tools in the

native's paws. Cain noted it all dully and replayed the deep notes of his

friend's voice.

Cain preferred to break with Fusilier tradition and issue verbal

orders to Abel. It always prompted a verbal response and it hardly

mattered to Colonel Joshua, as long as they got the job done. And Cain

was a far better soldier than Warner Bruch.

The short interview so far was as much of a trial to Leela, brimming

with so many questions of her own, as it was to the Doctor, impatiently

waiting on Leela's translation with each exchange. The words, she told

him sulkily, were not easy to produce and the Doctor seized on this as

the reason the TARDIS's telepathic circuits were not translating for

him in their usual way.

Leela felt drained by the effort of concentrating, but the Doctor

gave her an encouraging pat on the back. At the same time, he seemed

more distant than ever.

For her part, she had not seen the reason for the Doctor's sudden

air of gloom in their discussion with Trok'larr, as he had named

himself. His people were the P'tarr and they lived in a city a half-day's

walk back along the Tail, which they had established was a string of

islands stretching out from the main group. That much was simple.

Trok'larr had ventured here to drink the sap of the thu'loth tree

because it was his time to mate. The connection was lost on Leela, until

the Doctor explained that the sap probably triggered the necessary

changes in his body chemistry.

'Like carrots to help you see in the dark,' she murmured, repeating

the Doctor's example to herself.

When the Doctor had her (reluctantly) inquire about the fruit she

had stolen, Trok'larr had regarded her dubiously with black-bead eyes

she was beginning to see as highly intelligent. She retreated a pace as he

briefly snuffed the air closer to her mouth.

'I did not mean to,' she pleaded defensively.

Trok'larr bowed his head and brushed her arm with one claw, the

image of a sympathetic village elder. Leela was surprised and touched



by his gentleness. 'All trees bear fruit. All fruit is knowledge.  
But some

knowledge is poison.'

Leela, puzzled and perturbed, translated Trok'larr's lesson  
for the

Doctor. His silence worried her further, before he shrugged  
unconvincingly. 'Oh, absolutely. A little knowledge is a  
dangerous thing.

We'd better get both you and your apple under the  
microscope! The

next time you're hungry, you have only to ask for a jelly  
baby.' A distant

resolution glazed his eyes and Leela guessed he was seeing  
dangers

again. 'Meanwhile, there are people a lot greedier we should  
be

worrying about.'

Trok'larr traded looks between herself and the Doctor, but  
the

Doctor's gaze was elsewhere. A blur of motion upset the  
corner of her

eye, a splash of light colour bursting through the forest.

'Doctor, look out!'

The Doctor had spotted the six attackers some moments ago and

dodged to their left flank. She heard him shout in anger as she ducked

under the first one's charge and skewered her knife up between his ribs.

A blank visor obscured the features, but the facial muscles sagged

and red blood oozed from the grille at his mouth. The man's weight

dropped dead against her, so she dipped aside and yanked her blade

free, letting him fall and wheeling around to pick out where the fight

needed her most. Too many places.

The Doctor threw one of the guards over his shoulder, slamming

him into a tree. Another two soldiers were standing off, bringing rifles

to bear. Trok'larr was on all fours again, ambling back the way he had

come. The fifth man made the Doctor's mistake, dashing ahead to bar

the creature's path; he was flat on his back before he had time to aim

his rifle. The sixth, just on her right, raised his gun and fired.

A singing bolt of white flame exploded over Trok'larr's rump, leaving a smoking patch of charred armour-plate. Trok'larr merely

notched up his pace a little, his crashing bulk encouraging the fallen

trooper to roll swiftly clear. But the firer drew a bead on the weakened

armour before Trok'larr could disappear.

Leela hurled herself at the man, grabbing for his rifle. She yanked

hard on the barrel, but he stubbornly held fast. However, her efforts

were such that the bolt sizzled harmlessly down into the undergrowth.

The soldier roared at her; Leela dug her elbow into his stomach.

As he was buckling over, the Doctor's shout came a second time:

'Leela, run!'

She would never have obeyed if it hadn't been for the glimpse she

got of him raising his hands, and the fact that she knew he would have

some sort of plan. Wasting no time, she scooped one of the rifles from

the forest floor and sped along the trail, vaulting over the attacker

Trok'larr had almost trampled.

The planet dragged at her and her lungs ached and she worried

about the Doctor. Still, as she overtook Trok'larr, she knew exactly

where to head.

The angry volley of shots behind her and a bestial cry of pain

warned her not to wait for Trok'larr.

Now the Doctor was very unhappy.

He observed the movements of his captors around him, while

pretending half-heartedly to be concerned with the sluggish behaviour

of his yo-yo. Ridiculously overdressed in sky-blue parade-ground

greatcoats with polished silver buttons, forage caps and sturdy boots, it

was difficult to see where the men ended and the cybernetics began.

Those visored face-masks were embedded into the front of the skull,

he could tell that much from the men on either side of him. Only the

mouthpieces were detachable, and they seemed to be fairly standard

respirators, quite unnecessary for humans on this world. He assumed

that the uniforms were, imperialist fashion statements aside, sealed

combat suits.

The biggest fellow, massive as he was, needed another's help in

dragging Trok'larr's corpse back to the tree that would have made him

fertile. The officer shook his head at the sight and gradually became

aware of the Doctor's shadowy scowl.

'I ordered them to take prisoners.' He paused, then shifted angrily

away to stab a gloved finger at the burliest figure. 'I gave a direct

command, Abel! You could have wrestled this thing to the ground.

Why in the name of God did you have to shoot it?'

The Doctor studied Abel. The distorted bass of the voice was not

without its telling note of remorse. 'It was too big, Cain. It took four

bursts from the cannon.'

The Doctor found himself appraising the slain Trok'larr anew. He

had been a formidable, beautiful creature. Remarkable in so many

respects. .

The officer sighed and clutched the big man's shoulder, where the

serious bulk of the blaster cannon was suspended. For a leader, this

Cain spent too long searching for the right words. In the end, all he

managed was, 'Don't worry about it, Abel.'

'Huh! Letting off a murderer rather lightly, aren't you?' The Doctor

jerked his yo-yo hard into his hand, ready to stare straight into the

officer's visor as the man rounded on him. 'Yes?'

The struggle for the right words was shorter this time. Cain prodded

the Doctor in the chest. 'Abel is worth ten of you, you miserable tramp!

Ten!'

'Really?' The Doctor affected a misty disappointment. 'Pity - there's

only four of me so far and I've no idea when we'll be getting together

again.' Angrily, he then caught the man's finger before it was

withdrawn. 'Now, are you taking me to your leader or not?'

Snatching his finger free, Cain retreated. 'You're right. There's no

sense in delaying.' He waved at the two guards to march the Doctor

off. The mighty Abel bent low to hoist their dead comrade over his

shoulder.

The Doctor shrugged. Whoever these soldiers were, at least he

would get to meet their commanding officer. He hated being bullied by

mere subordinates.

'Did you do all this by yourselves? Can't say I'm impressed.'

The Doctor's contradictory tone was designed to provoke.  
When

Colonel Joshua struck him, the blow was hard enough to  
wind him and

knock him to his knees. Recovering gradually, he regarded  
his

surroundings again from this fresh angle.

The Cyberbase was a scrap yard, a shattered skeleton  
straddling the

island. Heaps of shredded steel, ripped from the  
foundations; walls and

bulkheads battered into twisted sheets; communication  
towers and

sensor rigs lying broken like scattered cocktail sticks;  
perimeter guns,

shield projectors, Cyberman helmets and chest units littered  
like so

many crumpled tin cans around the ruins. In the midst of it  
all a

handful of standing structures, punctured, bruised and  
blasted until just

a vestige of their original design remained. In fact, he  
noticed, the only

area that looked relatively intact was an enormous pit,  
ringed by a sort



of vented gunmetal cone.

The Doctor had his own disturbing ideas about that structure, but

he was suddenly distracted by Joshua looming over him against the

clear night sky.

'Let me see, all this would make you either very efficient soldiers -

or very poor archaeologists.'

Joshua hauled the Doctor up by the lapels. 'I have razed a city or

two, Doctor, rest assured, in the quest for Paradise,' he seethed, his

soulless visor boring into the Doctor's eyes. 'But something else

wrecked all this some time ago - wiped the Cybermen clean off this

planet and used that -' he thrust an arm out in the direction of the pit -

'particle battery to do much the same to their frigate in orbit. Perhaps

you'd care to apply your obvious intelligence to that puzzle.'

The Doctor hazarded a guess. 'It's possible they didn't have planning

permission.'

Joshua shook him violently by the shoulders, demonstrating in the

process the power of something more than human muscle. The Doctor

endured until he could safely bite his tongue.

'Don't provoke me again.' The finality of the warning secured the

Doctor's attention. 'It's this simple: if we learn nothing from you, we

hunt down your woman friend and torture her. Then we torch the

forest and see if the natives feel like talking.'

The Doctor considered. His mood hadn't improved since meeting

Colonel Joshua, but maybe now was not the time to antagonise the

fellow any further. Grudgingly, he said, 'Well, if you must know, I've

been trying to learn the truth myself. Of course my interest is of the

more detached scientific variety.' He lent his voice a more

conspiratorial quality. 'I'm sure it's nothing that can't be figured out if

we put our heads together. You seem like a logical sort of chap.'

Cain stepped into the lengthy pause. 'He has been fairly cooperative

since we picked him up, Colonel Joshua, sir. Full of questions, but

otherwise reasonable.'

Joshua nodded once, curtly, his mind made up. He kept his visor

trained on the Doctor. 'What sort of questions?'

'Oh, just curious about this and that. Who you chaps are, where

you're from, the significance of those interesting uniforms you're

wearing, that kind of thing.'

Joshua actually laughed, if a little grimly, seeming to measure every

pore and line of the Doctor's face. One of his gauntlets squeezed the

Time Lord's shoulder.

'Have you ever played Othello, Doctor?'

The Doctor looked surprised. 'Alas no,' he sighed. 'Hamlet. Oh, and

- 'he struck a heroic pose - 'Henry V, of course! "There is some soul of

goodness in things evil, would men observingly distil it out." Such an

optimist, the Bard.'

'You're babbling, Doctor,' Joshua cautioned dangerously. Even so,

he drifted off a pace or two in thought before facing his prisoner again.

'What are good and evil? The Cyberwars are a game of strategy. If the

enemy captures one of your pieces, fences it in, they convert it to their

colour so it works for them.' He paused, satisfied to have the Doctor's

full attention. 'You see where the comparison falls down? Mankind

never gets to convert its pieces back. They are lost souls, numbered

among the dead so they might be destroyed with a clear conscience.'

'Ah, but then, I always say a little *gilt* comes in handy for destroying

Cybermen.'

Joshua's fingers clamped around the Doctor's throat and tightened

ever so subtly. 'Try a drop of blacker humour, Doctor. What am I,

exactly, would you say? I'm sure a man of your intelligence can see how

it might happen: another victory, and the Imperial Marines sweep in to

rescue all the poor unfortunates reserved for the Cybermen's operating

table - there are always some who aren't quite finished. And then the

Imperial High Command has to do some sweeping of its own, under

the nearest available carpet.'

'Which is where you come in?'

'No. We've been abandoned. But we've grown stronger, gained our

own identity. The Mithran Fusiliers are a mercenary organisation,

dedicated to gaining more might, more security - in fact, power of our

own. We answer to neither Cybermen nor humans, and we welcome

any man or woman fortunate enough to have survived the surgical

knife of the Cybermen. Our church is a home for the thousands of lost

souls.'

'So, as victims you turn to religion for salvation?'

To his annoyance, the Doctor's probing went largely ignored. Joshua

pounced instead on the semantics. 'No, no! None of us is a victim.

That's the difference. That's the dividing line between the lost souls and

the ones who embrace our Order.'

The Doctor listened patiently, some warning light bracing him for a

stream of religious rhetoric. His instincts were not mistaken.

'Mondas was torn from the arms of her sister, Earth,' Joshua

continued, as if preaching, 'and the Cybermen were hurled across an

abyss from their human brethren. Do you see? If you know the history,

the whole purpose of the Cyberwars falls apart. These sides were never

meant to be in conflict. We are all meant to cross that abyss,  
to stand

on the bridge and look into the clearer waters below.'

The Doctor kept his face as blank as possible, but it wasn't  
laughter

he was masking.

'There is a point between states, as you put it, Doctor, a  
singularity

between the Cybermen and humanity, where a perfect  
balance is

achieved. The souls of Mondas and Earth reunited. Paradise,  
if you will.

Once a . . *victim* has seen that the Cybermen's surgery has  
merely set

them on that bridge, they can see themselves as chosen.  
Then they can

serve the Order, dedicate their lives to following that path -'

'Out into the middle of the abyss.' The Doctor nodded his  
dubious

understanding. And, predictably, the fist punched him to his  
knees

again.

The sun had fallen suddenly in an ocean of night, splashing  
darkness all

over the islands. Leela moved with confidence, familiar now with most

of the animal sounds and the shapes that scuttled in the shadows. Sure

of her path, she was comforted too by a foggy understanding of some

of the forces that worked the rifle she clutched at her hip. It was a

good weapon.

The secret of its magic did nothing to lessen her appreciation of its

power.

There was an expanse of shining water ahead, visible only in fragments through the leaves and branches. Edging closer, Leela was

soon standing on the shoreline, the lapping waters enclosed under a

magical cavern of trees.

The P'tarr city was a community of bulbous nests, clinging at dizzying heights to tall trunks or floating on enormous raft-like leaves

strewn over the surface of the channel. Hundreds of P'tarr were



clambering up to their homes, claws digging deep into the bark, or

paddling fairly clumsily to and from their giant lily-pad tents. Some

harvested plants from the shore or higher branches, stuffing the crop

into their pouches; others were plodding about and young could be

seen rolling and grappling on land or playing in the water.

Shouldering the rifle, Leela slipped down the low bank into her own

more graceful swim. The sea and air were still warm from the recently

departed daylight.

A few strokes took her to the nearest of the pads and the chief work

was in hauling herself on to its waxy surface. Her weight scarcely tilted

the leaf, but by the time she was on board a long snout could be seen

poking from the opening in the tent. The black eyes shone curiously for

a second, then prepared to duck back inside.

'No, wait, please,' appealed Leela urgently. 'My name is Leela. I am a

friend of Trok'larr. We were attacked by blue soldiers and I fear he may

have been captured.'

The P'tarr hovered in his doorway. 'You have eaten of the kess'tak.'

Leela hung her head. 'Yes,' she said humbly, 'I did not mean to

scrump. Trok'larr and my friend, the Doctor, have said I might be

poisoned.'

The P'tarr shuffled about and dipped its own head. Emerging from

its home, it shambled towards Leela. On hind legs, it perched a claw on

Leela's knee, snuffing the air before her as Trok'larr had done. Finally,

it tipped its head to examine her features.

'I am Kan'rath,' he declared chirpily 'and you are welcome, Leela,

friend of Trok'larr. What is it you wish of the P'tarr?'

'I wish nothing,' Leela explained earnestly, 'except your help to

rescue Trok'larr and the Doctor. We must quickly mount a counter-

attack.'

'You must tell me everything that happened. Then we will decide.'

In the P'tarr language, it was said pleasantly enough. Leela had just

been hoping for a touch more enthusiasm.

The Doctor was preparing to play the serpent. The temptation would

be simplicity itself; avoiding suspicion would be the tricky part. Seated

on a small heap of debris, he was biding time with his yo-yo while the

overzealous Colonel Joshua organised the sifting and analysis of the

wreckage for clues. Abel, his guard, was not the best of company.

Even so, he couldn't disguise a sniff of disappointment when

Joshua's moonlit shadow eventually fell over him. Whipping the toy

neatly into his pocket, he brushed a hand back through his curls and

looked up. 'You know what I think?'

'What, Doctor?' Joshua inhaled, tensing himself apparently for a

smart quip.

'Coded RNA programmes in the local vegetation, passed on through

the digestive system.'

Joshua squatted in front of the Doctor, hooked but wary.

'You're

serious?'

'Well, I've seen stranger things.' The Doctor kept his tone

speculative, objective. 'One of the locals gave me a few pointers before

your man shot him. Now I've had a chance to think, it makes a certain

sense. Throws up a whole range of questions in the bargain, but that's

science all over. You never get to the end -'

'And you never get to the point, Doctor!'

The Doctor idly played his hat for a concertina as he scanned the

forest, already encroaching on the ruined base. 'Think about it. The

natives are a primitive lot, content with the status quo. Why shouldn't

they be? More than enough to go round, no need for squabbles. They

don't even react to much, unless you're in their way.'

'Or until an outside threat appears, yes, I'm beginning to see. Go on.'

'Well, use of electronics, shield technology, nuclear physics.  
.It's all

here in one form or another, I expect. They just munch on  
whatever

they need in a time of crisis. Food for thought. Not much  
different to

you chaps plugging in another chip - except, of course, they  
get a

square meal thrown in. I don't know quite what my friend  
ate, but it

certainly helped to break the language barrier. Yes, pick a  
few bananas

and you'd soon be able to reproduce the works of  
Shakespeare with -

oh - a fraction of the monkeys and typewriters.'

'Yes, I think I get the picture. And spare me the quotations.'  
Joshua

stroked his chin around the respirator. Ugly greed lurked  
behind his

visor. 'But the ability to programme like that -'

'Exclusive to the P'tarr, I'd imagine. They must be one of the  
truly

ancient races. Old enough to have forgotten more than they know.

There's no telling what secrets might be locked away in those trees. You

haven't seen any fruit flies, have you? A few nibbles of a peach and

who knows what they -'

'Shut up, Doctor.' Joshua stood, determination in his stance. 'You'll

have plenty of time to play court jester as soon as my men have done

some foraging. I think it's time I staged a banquet in celebration of the

Order's new claim.'

'I was rather afraid you might,' the Doctor murmured under his

breath. He watched the figure of Joshua stride across the wreckage of

the base. Bound for Eden.

The P'tarr decision process consisted of Kan'rath paddling off to carry

the news to his fellows, whereupon the other P'tarr would drop what

they were doing and bustle away to inform their neighbours. The

activity looked set to continue for ages.

So Leela lay down and curled herself into a sleeping position on the

floating pad. She was just about to dip into a dream when a nudge

against her upper arm disturbed her. Waking, she opened her eyes to a

close-up of, she supposed, Kan'rath's muzzle.

'It is agreed,' he told her as she shook herself alert. 'These soldiers

are not the first to hunt near the thu'loth farm. I and nine others will

accompany you to battle them. But first we must relearn the arts of

war.'

The latter took a moment to register. Leela grabbed at her host's

forelimb. 'Your people have no warriors! But we do not have the time

to train you.'

'We will harvest berries from the tik'ssotar trees along our route.'

'And you will tip your blades with their poison?' Leela frowned. And

then she remembered: like carrots to help you see in the dark.



The Doctor stretched back, the night shut out by the hat over his face,

deliberating on the unnatural silence with which the Fusiliers went

about their business. It offered a keyhole into their reverent observance

of artificial traditions, their literally religious dependence on cybernetics.

Misguided, no matter how fervently Joshua insisted otherwise, these

Mithran Fusiliers were still victims - and of more than just the

Cybermen. The Doctor was hoping that it was the key to the situation

here.

His every sense was alert for the signal sound of Joshua's voice.

Instead, a lighter approach over the debris revealed an unexpected

visitor. Tapping up the brim of his hat, he recognised the figure of Cain

standing over him. The Doctor's guard, Abel, moved around next to his

comrade.

'Doctor,' Cain's voice addressed him. His arm jerked and a soft,

round object plopped on to the Doctor's stomach. The Doctor trapped

it in his hand. 'The fruit checks out toxin-free and the Colonel has

sampled the produce.'

The pale colour and furry texture were certainly reminiscent of a

peach. 'Ah, no thanks,' the Doctor muttered, tossing the fruit aside and

patting his belly. 'I've already eaten the plums. Taught me everything I

know about thermodynamics. Go on, test me.'

Cain started picking his way to where the fruit had landed. His

fingers worked to unclasp the respirator at his mouth. 'If you've no use

for it, I'll eat it my -'

In a flash, the Doctor was rolling to his feet and diving for the fruit

like a baseball player for the plate. He heard Abel chasing after him and

felt the boot hammer down on his arm, fixing it in place. Inches from

his goal.

Cain regarded the Doctor carefully, looking more human with his

thin smile exposed. His right hand snaked out to reach for the fruit. 'I

wouldn't if I were you,' warned the Doctor, grimacing.

'And why's that exactly?'

The Doctor lowered his eyes, fighting more than the pressure on his

arm. He had been caught cheating at cards and now he had to own up

and trust in his judgement of human character. Meeting Cain's blank

gaze, he added, 'What if I simply said, there's no reason why one bad

apple should make the whole barrel rotten?'

Cain couldn't avoid an involuntary glance across the ruins. 'You

mean the Colonel?'

The Doctor prepared to explain, but Leela's sudden shout, breaking

over the forest like a war cry, robbed him of his chance.

'Doctor! Look out!' she called, as the first tremors began in what

seemed like a monstrous earthquake.

As soon as he saw her, the Doctor regretted telling her that story

about Hannibal when she had asked if any warriors were counted

among the great men of history. He should have just stuck with old

Boney. It was the former she emulated, leading her small band of P'tarr

stampeding out on to the open field of debris.

They had chosen their moment well, with the enemy preoccupied,

himself off to one side with only two guards. A solitary shout of alarm

went up from Colonel Joshua.

Leela herself was sighting along the barrel at Abel and the Doctor

was a fraction too late in waving his spare arm. The blue-white bolt

sang out and Abel keeled over, a smoking gouge in his flank. Freed, the

Doctor leapt to his feet and waved at his companion with great

urgency.

'Leela, no! Call them off! Call them off now!'

It was a vain request: Leela's ten P'tarr were as unstoppable as

Hannibal's elephants. Charging from several directions over the scrap

piles, they ignored the first wild hail of blaster shots and fell on the

Fusiliers like living siege engines. Some balled themselves into spiked

boulders, practically catapulting themselves at their foes with a

powerful spring of the tail. Others wielded their tails as maces, digging

deep and shattering bone. From the downed men, the P'tarr seized

rifles and found new targets with quick, deadly accuracy. In a few

frenetic seconds, the Fusiliers were totally outmanoeuvred.

The Doctor sought out Joshua, who was throwing off a P'tarr corpse, pulling a bloody sword from its underside. Dumping his dead

foe, he staggered clear, his uniform darkened by a spreading stain.

Nearby, another P'tarr charged. Cain's rifle fired, but he was pinned

flat, the P'tarr claw stabbing for his open collar. The Doctor shouted a

protest and Leela, scampering over, echoed him at last.

'Kan'rath! Spare that one!' Her cry hinted that she thought she might

just possibly have acted a little rashly.

Kan'rath hesitated. 'You are the better judge in warfare,' he said

eventually, and shrugged.

'I can't disagree, unfortunately.' The Doctor was glowering. He

snatched the rifle from Leela and flung it with sufficient force to

genuinely startle her.

'I am sorry Doctor. I was only thinking to rescue you and Trok'larr.'

Her mention of Trok'larr helped spare her the rest of the Doctor's

wrath. That and the fact that there were other more pressing concerns.

'Trok'larr is dead. And there'll be plenty of time for apologies later.' He

knelt to examine Abel, whose breaths were rasping loudly. To Cain, he

said, 'He'll need proper treatment - but he'll live.'

'Thank you, Doctor. For sparing us.' Cain regarded the P'tarr above

him, an uncertain flicker crossing his lips. 'Am I free to go?'

'Yes, I should think so,' the Doctor said. 'But we have to find the

Colonel. He's in a fragile state of mind right now and there's no telling

what your little escapade might have provoked. Probably the opposite

of what I'd hoped. Come on, Leela, don't dawdle!'

The Doctor was already striding off and Leela had to trot to keep

up. Kan'rath shuffled aside to release Cain, taking care not to plant a

foot down on any part of him. Cain lifted himself on to his knees,

watching the Doctor and Leela go.

After a moment's thought and a full analysis of his comrade's status,

he followed the strangers. 'I won't be long, old friend,' he said to Abel,

almost mechanically.

So this was Paradise.

Those refracted waters had been slowly crystallising into a clear

image even as the native life forms had commenced their crude assault.

Heaven's majesty unveiled.

Then a lucky thrust of his sword had saved his life, but stained the

blurred image in blood, resolving it, as he fought clear of the creature's

armoured bulk, as a landscape drowned in red. Colonel Joshua could

scarcely contain his screams.

Because Paradise, that absolute clarity of vision, was a panorama of

death, surrounding his senses and suffocating him with the faces and

souls of every single man, woman and child he had killed, their bodies

lying charred and bleeding in the streets of the cities he had destroyed.

Where once cold memory had noted the statistics, a heart struggled

helplessly to come to terms with them.

The Doctor had been right: the world he had plundered was really



Paradise, after all. This vision, he realised with terrible certainty, was

Hell. The weight of conscience broke the fragile bridge on which he

stood and plunged him into the abyss.

The only choice left to him there was the manner of his death.

They found him on the bare, functional floor of the Acolyte's grey

bridge, curled like an infant in death's womb, a bloody spike jutting

through his back - a warrior's sword embraced with superhuman

strength. Over this dismal scene, the flickering console lights were like

a hundred tiny candles. The Doctor knelt beside the fallen soldier and

spoke in suitably hushed tones.

'He took his own life. He must have distilled out what little good

there was.'

'Doctor, that is another of your riddles.' Leela enjoyed a chance to

challenge the Doctor.

'The fruit from the trees, Leela. Knowledge biochemically stored had

to be accessed intuitively, as the P'tarr do. It would have supplanted the

logical interface with the cybernetic half of his brain. Reinforced the

human and cut him off from the Cyberman. Separated the man from

the machine.'

Leela preferred the warrior's perspective. 'And he came here to seek

an honourable death?'

The Doctor stood and shrugged expansively. 'Well - that, or to

atone for his sins - a whole career of bloody deeds confronted for the

first time.'

'Memories restored?' hazarded a voice from just inside the bridge

bulkhead. It was Cain, who had stolen silently in to listen some

moments before.

Leela whirled around. The Doctor turned at a more leisurely rate.

Cain's visor was fixed on his dead commander as he spoke.  
'Doctor, I'd

like to believe you were right. We aren't all the same. I still  
have a soul

in me and I think this place should be protected. Inviolable.  
I'm offering

to. .well, to guard its secret.'

The Doctor seemed unsure. 'That's a very generous offer,  
but the

salary's poor.'

'I thought I might manage on an apple a day.' He waited for  
the

Doctor's smile to match his own. 'I think - I'm hoping - the  
effects on

myself and my friends will be quite different. The ship can  
be scuttled,

our records of this world erased, and there are weapons at  
the base,

force-field projectors that can be repaired -'

'Then why do we not adjust them?' suggested Leela, the  
light of

insight firing her eyes. She had some small measure of guilt  
for which

she wished to atone. 'A refractive field could be made to  
reflect back a

view of empty ocean, could it not, Doctor?'

The Doctor stood like a statue, his expression set to mimic the

Venus de Milo's immediately after her arms had fallen off. Eventually,

his features furrowed into an irritable frown.

'Have you been scrumping again? I'm warning you, the effects of

those apples had better fade fast, young lady, or else - or else -' He

faltered.

Leela prompted him, only slightly worried. 'Or else what?'

The Doctor ignored her and looked to where Cain had been standing. 'You wouldn't happen to have any vacancies for an Eve, I suppose?'

His hopeful inquiry was left unanswered. Cain had already stepped

out into the garden.

64 Carlisle Street

by Gary Russel

*Statement by Thomas Greene, Footman to Lord Greystone*

Mr Golightly had been in service all of his life. Born into it, he always

said. Literal like. His Da had been butler to old Lady Bostwich in her

Harlech estate and Golightly had been born there. Brought up to be

footman and assumed the mantle of butler on his Da's early passing.

Almost immediately the Bostwiches had come to a sticky end out in the

Crimea and Golightly had moved to London with one of the nephews

in about '56. Now, fifty or so years on, he was due to retire.

Of course, there was no way of knowing for sure that I was going to

take over, but Mr Golightly seemed to like me and I got on with the

master - well, as much as any of the servants could say they got on with

the gentry - so I just kept my fingers crossed and hoped. Mind you, this

meant I had to be on my best behaviour at all times - no larking around

downstairs with Matilda or Emily; up at the crack of dawn to oversee

the parlour maid cleaning out the fireplaces and to help Mrs Doyle

fetch and carry from the butcher's. She was a good'un, our Mrs Doyle.

Not really a missus at all - I remember Mr Golightly telling me once

that it was customary for cooks in big houses to be called missus even if

they weren't. Oh, she shouted and scorned and cursed us at times, but

underneath it all, she had a heart of pure gold.

I tell you, it all started to go wrong that morning last week when I

answered the door, Whoever it was had an impatient air about them -

they were using the end of their cane to tap repeatedly on the front

door - you recognise the noises like that, you see. Well, Mr Golightly,

he couldn't get to the front door so fast these days, and it had sort of

become my job to answer it.

So I did. The man standing there was a bit. . well, unusual I suppose

you could say. I mean, not common or nothing, just a bit. .  
well, he

didn't carry himself like most of the master's acquaintances,  
if you get

my drift. Oh, he was class all right, no two ways about that.  
But he

reminded me of those types you see who've been out in the  
Congo or

India. Colonial types. Though he weren't no military man, of  
that I was

sure. Of course, with the master's visitors, he might've been  
an

explorer, one of them lot from out in Egypt or Greece.

Anyway, I opened the door to him and he came in, giving me  
his

cane. Nice cane it was too, pure silver top, good mahogany  
shaft. Not

cheap or nothing. He was old and moved slow, but his eyes  
seemed

very. . young. That's what I mean by strange, really. Here was  
an old

man, but he didn't act old. Just irritable.

What was really strange was that his chauffeur was outside  
on the

step with his bag. Blow me down if he didn't start to follow the man in,

casual as you like. Of course, I took the bag and pointed out the way

down to the servants' entrance - and he actually looked put out by this!

As if going in through the front door was an everyday occurrence for

him. Anyway, this old gentleman looks around the hallway and then tells

me to announce him to the master. What could I say? I mean, I didn't

know who he was and he'd not given me his card so. . Well, I had to

ask him, didn't I? I could feel Mr Golightly watching me from the top

of the stairs, but what else could I do?

'Name?' he said to me. 'Well, let me see now. Yes, yes, kindly tell

your master that the Doctor is here to see him, hmm?' So I nodded,

placed his cane in the basket and crossed to the morning room, where

the master was. . working.



I announced this Doctor, and the master seemed very pleased to see

him.

He said, 'Doctor, my dear friend, do come in. How delightful to see

you. 'Then he asked me to get some tea sent up, so I hurried out. I

asked Mr Golightly if there was anything else I could have done, and he

assured me I'd done it right. So we went downstairs and Emily started

boiling a kettle.

Alice, the parlour maid, was already dressed in her afternoon clothes

by now, and offered to take the tea up, as Mr Golightly was tired and I

needed to ask the young mistress what her plans for the day might be.

She was up on the first floor by now, you see, entertaining some of her

friends in the drawing room. Mrs Doyle didn't like that, I can tell you,

but the master didn't seem to mind. Since her ladyship passed on from

the flu three years gone, the master's been very keen to allow the young

mistress to have her way on things. She's a fiery one, she is, going to do

well one day. Wouldn't be surprised if she doesn't make it right through

the door into Parliament House. Ever since they jailed Christy

Pankhurst, the young mistress has got more and more involved with all

that. I mean, that's how we all came to meet. . to get involved with the

Marquis of Rostock. They had met at some political meeting and she

brought him to the house to meet the master. And that was when it all

went wrong, really. .

*Statement by Alice Fittle, Parlour Maid to Lord Geystone*

I don't remember the exact date that she turned up, but I do remember

the fuss she caused. She was soaking wet from the rain, looking a right

state with her hair all over the place. Gawd, she was a right old mess.

Mrs Doyle took to her immediately though, which made her all right in

my book.

She let her in and we all led her to the fireplace to keep warm. Mr

Golightly gave her a nip of brandy, which Matilda thought was very

funny - but she's easily amused, not all there if you get my drift.

Anyway, this poor wretch said she'd come looking for a job. She'd

heard from a friend of a friend that, as we'd lost Doris up to the

Bellamys in Chelsea, we were looking for a new under-parlour maid. Mr

Golightly and Mrs Doyle seemed keen on the girl, but since I'd be

responsible for her, they offered me the choice of trying her out or

telling her to go. Well, although the girl looked like she'd never done a

day's work in her life, quite frankly, I said yes, and sent her to tidy

herself up.

About an hour later, after she was dry and in a clean uniform, we

took her up to meet the master. He saw her in the drawing room and

they seemed to get on well.

'What's your name?' he asked.

'Dorothea Chaplet,' she said, a bit smug-like, if you ask me.

'That's a big name for such a little servant,' The master replied, and

that's when I knew we had trouble on our hands.

'Well, I like it,' this Dorothea snapped at him. I fair thought he'd

have a heart attack, but no, he just laughed and said he'd call her Dottie.

'You won't, you know,' she retorted. 'If you must, call me Dodo.'

That's what my friends used to call me.'

So Dodo it was, and I still don't know how she got away with speaking to him so rudely.

Later that night, Dodo and I were talking about her duties. Despite

her claims of service experience and her references, she was very

ignorant of what was expected of her. She said it had been some

months since she had last worked and I chose not to inquire further.

That was Mr Golightly's task, if anyone's.

Over the next few days, Dodo fitted in quite well. She was a bit

lippy, for certain, but she quickly got used to quietening down when

His Lordship or Miss Annabel was around, which was a blessing! She

was good at her job, very thorough, very efficient, but clearly didn't like

the work and I often found myself wondering what made her go into

service. Despite her voice and her common looks, she clearly knew far

more educated things than the rest of us, except Mr Golightly, of

course. I was really warming to her.

And then the Marquis of Rostock appeared one afternoon, and

nothing was ever the same again.

Tommy had come downstairs to tell us that the marquis - a friend of

Miss Annabel's - had arrived.

I was a bit intrigued, which I know is wrong, but you can't always

help yourself, if you know what I mean. I made sure Tommy was too

busy to take up afternoon tea so as I could do it myself.

When I walked into the room, I should have known something was

wrong. The air was. . well, it was cold. Like a window was wide open.

Although it couldn't've been cold really, because Dodo's fire was

blazing away - she done a good job, there. Can't fault her on that.

The marquis, well, he looked at me, strange-like. But he smiled and

took the tea and a fancy, and kept on making small talk with Miss

Annabel.

Then Dodo walked in, completely unexpected. Of course, I tried to

make her go, but it was as if she wanted to be there, to break the rules

and spoil the afternoon. She ignored my shooing, and just stared at the

marquis.

He stared back at her, 'Good afternoon,' he said, and smiled. 'Do I

know you?' She kept staring at him. 'Perhaps you feel you know me?' I

didn't understand none of this, mind. I just knew that Dodo shouldn't

have been there, and the marquis shouldn't have spoken to her so

informally.

I had to drag Dodo away, and I led her straight down to Mr Golightly, to tell him what had happened.

*Statement by Lord Geoffrey Greystone*

First, for the record, I feel I must point out that my title is honorary. I

am not a lord by birth but by marriage. My late wife, Lady Edith

Greystone, nee Howarth, and I were married in 1883. My background

is in finance and engineering management. Amongst my major dealings

have been overseas plantations, European exports, and, most recently, I

have been involved with the creation of the train system  
being

expanded beneath the streets of London.

I met Edith at a banquet and we become betrothed after her  
father,

the late Lord Howarth of Lanarkshire, gave his blessing.  
Many of my. .

detractors - and as a man of wealth and importance in  
society, I have

many - have claimed I married into money. Whilst that may  
be literally

the truth, figuratively it is not. I married the most beautiful,  
intelligent

and joyful woman it has ever been my privilege to meet. Her  
death in

1906 was a great sorrow to me. I proceeded to bring up my  
dear

daughter, Annabel, as best I could, although I fear that  
without a

mother she may have been more easily influenced by those  
outside the

walls of 64 Carlyle Street.

But, to the business at hand.

I met the Doctor while dining with some old business  
partners at



the Bentinck Hotel in Duke Street. He was staying there,  
aided by his

confidant and chauffeur, Taylor.

Like me, the Doctor seemed to be enamoured of the fictions  
of

Verne and Twain, two authors less similar you cannot  
imagine. We

spoke amiably about their work, the Doctor offering new  
insights into

the minds of both men; although as Verne has been dead  
nigh on four

years and Mr Clemens is reportedly very ill, quite how the  
Doctor can

claim to have spent many years working alongside them at  
the start of

their careers and during their respective twilights somewhat  
confounds

me. Still, he is very aged and, I suspect, rather given to  
fanciful stories

to brighten up what must be a desperately lonely dotage.

The Doctor asked me if I had ever heard of the Marquis of  
Rostock

during our second or third dinner at the Bentinck (you must

understand that the lady owner of the hotel is one of  
society's most

famous cooks as well - one suspects that to eat there is the closest one

may get to eating as royalty do. It has been suggested that she and the

King himself are more than just close friends, if you get my drift).

But I digress once more. The Doctor. . Yes, he seemed very interested in the marquis. I had never heard of him, which he thought

was strange as he seemed to believe my daughter knew the man.

That evening, I asked Annabel about this and she claimed she did

indeed know 'Ross' as she called him. I suggested a meeting between

this 'Ross' and the Doctor, and she agreed immediately.

The Doctor duly arrived on the evening arranged and I asked

Thomas - although he was our footman, he was acting as butler at the

time - where was I? Oh, yes, I asked Thomas to fetch the marquis and

Annabel from the drawing room, to join the Doctor and myself.

A few moments later, he did so, and I knew instantly that he and my

new friend the Doctor had met before.

And that there was nothing but hostility between them

'So, you've got here then, hmm?' the Doctor said to him. He was

holding his head up imperiously, as if daring the marquis to reply. 'You

know I cannot let you do what it is you are planning. No, I cannot.

And I shall stop you, sir.'

The marquis just laughed and said, 'My dear Doctor, must you be

so. . so alarmist in front of our hosts. I recall last time we met, you

deeply upset the local government. Indeed, they were so upset with you

that they confiscated your - your rather intriguing mode of transport.'

The Doctor clasped his lapels and gave a haughty sneer. I was rather

perturbed now - surely these two would cease their verbal brawling,

especially as Annabel and the servants could see or hear them. But I

was wrong.

'You do not belong here, young man,' he said. 'I detected your

presence, and I've been tracking your movements for many months

now. Oh, yes, I have.'

And that was when my world turned upside down.

This Marquis of Rostock held open his hand.

'A gift for you, Lord Greystone,' he said. 'A gift I trust your kind will

help me employ wisely.'

In his palm was a strange silver. . thing. At first I thought it was a

giant ball-bearing, but then I realised it was soft, pliable. Indeed, it

appeared to be moving of its own accord, gently rocking in the palm of

his hand.

The Doctor breathed in noisily. 'No,' I recall he said. 'Surely you

haven't brought that with you as well! It could do incalculable damage -

' But he stopped.

And so did I as the silver thing leapt off Rostock's hand and, under

its own momentum, shot across the room and hit my darling daughter

Annabel in the chest.

What happened next remains just a blur to me. . I cannot claim to

understand it. .

*Statement by Emily Trott, Kitchen Maid to Lord Greystone*

Working down here in the kitchen I never got to go upstairs, where

they says all the goings-on started. I mean I ain't *never* been up there. I

seen it through the front door once, when I got sent on a holiday to

the seaside by her ladyship a few years ago.

It looked lovely inside. I mean, it had plants and I could see the big

staircase and the black and white tiled floor and the big painting of an

animal above the morning room.

I have to use them small stairs behind the pantry to get up to the

room what I shares with Matilda. We don't get to see much of anything

that way. It's a nice room, mind, can't say anything but that.  
Not too

big, but all right for us two.

Anyway, I was downstairs cleaning out Mrs Doyle's big  
pheasant

pots when there was a tapping on the servants' door.

The new girl, Dodo, ran to open it. She knew the man there,  
I'm

sure of it. She began to speak to him, but he ignored her,  
hoping I

wouldn't notice nothing.

But I did.

I saw the look what he give her. Telling her to shut up, I say.

'Hello,' he said to me. 'My name is Taylor. Can I get a drink?'

He was very handsome. Tall, broad man, looking a treat in  
that

green uniform. He had a lovely smile and when he took his  
cap off, he

had short hair all smoothed back.

I offered to make him a cup of tea, just as Mrs Doyle come in.

'Who're you then?' she said, not unkind-like, just a bit short.  
Like

when she talks to me or Matilda.

'I'm with the Doctor. That gentleman what's come to see Lord

Greystone,' he said. Well, I expect he said it better than that because he

was quite cultured, he was. Didn't seem the service type really. Did I say

he had lovely eyes? Really brown and smiley, they was. 'Well, get our

guest some tea, Emily,' Mrs Doyle said to me, so I started to boil a

kettle.

Dodo sat him down. Mr Golightly was sleeping in the corner, snoring ever so loud he was, but no one said nothing about it. Alice

was coming down the stairs, Matilda behind her and I guessed that

Tommy was upstairs if a gentleman had come to see the master because

he was having to be butler, what with Mr Golightly's illness and

everything.

This Taylor, he was chatting away to Dodo, and I knew I was right.

They talked about the weather and the house, but I'm not as stupid

as some people think, you know. They were talking in some sort of

secret code, I think. But it didn't matter none, because he was really

nice and I didn't think he was the type to cause no trouble or nothing.

Of course, I was wrong.

After a few moments, I brought him a tea, and one for Mrs Doyle.

'Oh, thanks. Where's mine?' said Dodo.

I ask you - a servant wanting tea in the afternoon. Well, you can

imagine the look on Mrs Doyle's face at that. .

'Where are you from, Mr Taylor?' she asked.

'Oh, around and about. The Doctor travels a lot,' says he.

So Mrs Doyle says, 'Been anywhere exciting?'

'Oh, a few places. Nowhere you'd have heard of.' He glanced at

Dodo again, and she was smiling.

She knew something, I tell you.

Mrs Doyle shrugged. 'I've heard of lots of places, Mr Taylor,' she

said. 'Try me'



'Tombstone in America,' he says. And Paris in France.'

'Well, of course I've heard of Paris,' Mrs Doyle snapped. 'I ain't been

there, but I know where it is.'

Mr Golightly woke up for a minute and said as how he'd been to

Paris when he was a boy. Then he dropped off again.

At least, that's what we thought.

I think it was Alice that said it first. She reached out and took Mrs

Doyle's hand and spoke to her quiet-like. I didn't hear nothing she said,

but I could see Mr Golightly weren't sleeping no more.

Mrs Doyle gasped and Taylor moved beside Mr Golightly, touching

his neck, then his wrist. He moved back slightly and took Mrs Doyle's

other hand, but she'd started crying and wailing and everything.

I heard Matilda start up too and realised that, if no one stopped her,

she'd make a terrible row, so I tried to calm her while Alice looked

after Mrs Doyle.

Dodo said she'd go get the Doctor, and although it weren't really

her place to do so, I don't think none of us thought about that at the time.

And that's when everything went really strange.

The door at the top of the stairs to the hall were flung open and..

and then she come downstairs. All silver she was, with things like

fireflies buzzing around her.

'Miss Annabel,' said Alice, and it was her and all.. Except, like I said,

she was all silver. Her face, her clothes, her beautiful hair, like. . like a

statue brought to life.

I remember Taylor pulling Dodo aside, trying to protect her.

'Why is this creature making this noise?' Miss Annabel says - I can

still remember it - them words sent shivers up my spine. That weren't

really Miss Annabel talking. It looked like her, but it weren't her. Not

no way.

And Mrs Doyle, who was still wailing, looked up at her and started

screaming.

That's when Miss Annabel did the pointing thing and Mrs Doyle

stopped her noise. She just sat back in her chair, her mouth open and

staring forward. It were like one of them electrical lights being switched

off. Mrs Doyle were just switched off.

Then Taylor and Dodo rushed up the steps, past Miss Annabel and

out into the hall.

*Statement by Miss Annabel Greystone, daughter to Lord Greystone*

It was as if I was not really there any more. As if I was inside my body,

but actually not inside it. I could feel someone else beside me. Rather

like going for a walk in the park with Mama, like I used to. I heard it

speak to me. I have no idea now whether it was male or female. It

reminded me, I suppose, of Ross, but at the same time it was different.

But I know what it said to me. Every time I think about it, I remember. It is rather like a recording on a wax cylinder. It is inside my head now. Always.

'I am not here to hurt you,' it said. 'I just wish to explore. That is my purpose. To adapt. To create. To begin anew.'

I had no idea what it was talking about, of course. I turned to look

at Papa and his guest, but they seemed to be not quite. . well, not

entirely there. I can only think I was either unwell or seeing things

through the eyes of the voice in my body.

My father's guest was pointing angrily at Ross and then me. He said,

'Look what you've done, you meddlesome fool. Is this your gift to this

planet and this time? This universe, hmm? The absorption of this

delightful young lady?'

And then the noise started from below. I remember thinking something was happening to the servants - it sounded like dear sweet

Mrs Doyle - and before I knew what was happening, I was on the steps

to the kitchen.

Mrs Doyle was crying loudly and all I could think was how I wished

she would stop.

And then she did.

I was aware of two people pushing past me - one I recognised as

that new under-parlour maid with the silly name; the other a man I did

not know. We. . I followed them back upstairs and into the hall.

They were standing with the Doctor, arguing and pointing at me.

'This wasn't supposed to happen, Doctor,' said the man.

'I know, my boy, I know. I miscalculated the depths this young fool

would sink to.' The Doctor said, then looked straight at my father. I

wanted to tell them that it would be all right, that I was enjoying this

experience, but I could not speak.

'We have travelled far,' the voice said to me, and I realised the others

could hear it as well. 'I ordered Roztoq to bring me here as a result of

your meddling on our planet, Doctor. When we learned what else was

out there, when we learned there were other universes beyond our own,

our home seemed microscopic and unimportant.'

The man I didn't know seemed to agree. 'I can understand your

desire to explore. I'm guilty of it too. But I'm careful. I have the Doctor

as a guide. How did you get here?'

Ross - or Roztoq, as he had been revealed to be - answered, and I

knew the voice that spoke through him was also the voice inside me.

'Because, to use the vernacular of these primitives, we "rode the coat-

tails" of the Doctor's TARDIS. He brought us here, to this planet. I..

we. . "let go" shortly before you landed. Once we learned of this planet

through his. . heritage, we knew it was what we needed.'

'Heritage?' That was that silly Dodo girl.

'Oh, ignore his babbling, my child,' said the Doctor. 'He knows

nothing of my heritage. But I know of his. Of theirs.' He addressed

Roztoq once more. 'You poor, pitiful, lost creatures. Don't you realise

that you have no part in this Universe? Every second you spend here is

destroying the nexus of all realities? Well, does that mean anything to

you, hmm? Just by leaving Quinnis, by leaving the Fourth Universe and

entering this one, you have damaged a reality that isn't your own'.

'So? You do it all the time,' Roztoq said.

'My ship is protected, it re-seals the breaches it makes in the Vortex,

whether through time or space or other dimensions. You broke

through, you and your symbiont here, and the damage needs repairing.

The longer you stay in a universe not your own, you risk tearing at the

very fabric of their reality. Do you understand me?'

'Then repair it yourself, Traveller,' said the voice inside me.  
'We want

to live here. To escape the state of Ronnos.'

The Doctor tossed his head back, giving Roztoq and then me  
- or

whatever possessed me - his most unsympathetic gaze. 'So,  
you are

criminals, are you, hmm? On the run from the prison moon.  
Well, if I

brought you here, I see it as my duty to take you home.  
Willingly or

unwillingly.'

My father was confused, I could see it written on his face.  
'Who are

these. . people, Doctor?'

The Doctor gave Roztoq a contemptuous snort. 'This? This is  
nothing. Cattle. The equivalent of a mindless beast of  
burden on your

planet. Like an ox. Or a faithful dog. His thoughts, his words  
and his

actions are animated by the symbiont controlling your  
daughter. By

creating the personality of this "marquis", they were more  
easily able to



blend into your society.'

He turned back to look at me. Us.

And then something extraordinary happened. The Doctor walked

towards me. Us. And reached out for my face.

And I heard him speak, but so softly it was like. . like the wind on

autumn leaves, gently brushing my ears.

'Fight it, dear child,' he whispered. 'This power that has enveloped

you is misguided, dangerous. It has no place here. Now it's left its

original host, it needs you to keep it awake. To keep it sentient. It does

not belong here on this planet, in this place. If you shut it out now,

before it can absorb you wholly, it cannot function. It is nearing the

end of its energy, and will soon take yours. Fight it, my dear, you must

fight it. Remember who you are.'

And I saw Mama. And Grandpapa. And Aunt Morag. And other

people I knew to be dead and gone.

They were all asking me to fight the voice. And there, amidst them, I

could see the imperious face of the Doctor, smiling at me. Encouraging

me. And I knew that however pleasant the voice inside me was, I could

trust this Doctor more.

And so I told the voice to leave me.

And it did.

*Statement by Matilda Jenkins, Scullery Maid to Lord Greystone*

We was watching from the top of the stairs. Me and Emily was

frightened but we still watched as the silver angel flew away from Miss

Annabel, and she fell down and weren't silver no more. Then the angel

seemed to vanish and the old gentleman what was His Lordship's

visitor reached down and picked something up, and His Lordship took

poor Miss Annabel into the morning room, helped by Thomas.

Oh, and then the driver what had had tea with us hit the young

marquis on the chin, just like this - *wal op!* - and he fell down, and the

old man told him to carry him out to their car. And he said that he

knew where the 'entry point' was or something, that his 'TARDIS had

traced it' and that now they'd 'found them' they would take them back

and 'seal up the breach'. But I didn't know what none of it meant. I just

held Emily's hand and prayed Miss Annabel would be all right again.

And Dodo went with them and we never saw her again. Never.

Nor the driver, Taylor weren't it? Nor the old gentleman or the

marquis.

And that's really where it went funny, because the next thing I knew

was that the policemen came and the ambulance took away poor Mr

Golightly and Mrs Doyle, who never spoke another word, never.

And.. and now I'm sitting here talking to you and I'm really a bit

afraid because I've not seen Emily or Alice or Mrs Doyle or his

Lordship since and I don't like it up here much. I don't fit in with all

them fancy pictures and chairs and things.

I just want to go downstairs again. Back to my life in the kitchens of

64 Carlyle Street.

Where I belong.

'What do you think, Sergeant?'

Sergeant Dunston shrugged as they walked down the long pathway.

'I really don't know, sir. It all seems a bit odd to me. And I don't think

we'll be getting much out of Mrs Doyle'

Inspector Brown agreed. 'At first I was tempted to think that

someone had assaulted Miss Greystone, possibly this Rostock fellow,

and they were covering up to save her honour. But the death of the old

butler and this, this. . what did the quack call it?'

'A "catatonic state",' said Dunston, consulting his notebook.

Brown nodded. 'Right, well, whatever Mrs Doyle is in makes me

think it's some sort of delayed shock to the old man's death. I mean,

he'd been a pretty permanent fixture in the household for donkey's

years.'

'The lads checked up on this Doctor Whoever-he-was and this

Dorothea Chaplet and Steven Taylor. None of them were registered at

the Bentinck Hotel and Mrs Trotter there doesn't recognise their

descriptions at all. And there's no Marquis of Rostock either. Never has

been as far as we can tell.'

'Guess we'll not get to the bottom of all this in a hurry, Sergeant'.

Sergeant Dunston flipped his notebook shut and pointed to the sign

next to the tall iron gates as they passed through.

'I reckon the whole lot of them should be in there with Mrs Doyle,

sir.' 'If they stick to this mad fiction, Sergeant,' said Inspector Brown,

shaking his head, 'I've a feeling they'll be joining her.  
Masters and

servants all waited on together.'

As the Inspector trudged off down the road, smiling at his  
little

joke, Dunston shut the gates of the Little Sisters of Marcham  
Common's Home for the Mentally Unstable behind them.

The Eternity Contract

by Steve Lyons

Patricia Hopkins died today. It came as something of a  
surprise.

As she lay on dirty tarmac, life ebbing from her broken body,  
her

fading thoughts were of the things that she had still to do.  
Who would

chase up those creditors? Deal with the coffee account?  
Voyeurs

crowded around her. She wanted to stand, send them  
scuttling away

with a few well-chosen words and resume her daily bustle.  
Patricia had

always lived at top speed. She had not become one of  
London's most

successful advertising executives by standing still.

She hadn't seen the car coming. Too busy juggling too many things.

Hurrying to a meeting; checking her organiser to see if she could fit in a

lunch date; scolding her PA into action over the mobile, while

considering a replacement.

Too many things. Now she could do none of them. The spark of

life abandoned her, before she could even accept what was happening.

Patricia Hopkins died today.

And found herself in the drawing room of an old house, the sympathetic faces of an elderly couple looming over her.

'Awake at last, dear,' said the woman; a voice and a smile like melted

sugar. 'Would you like a cup of tea?'

'Take it easy,' said the man. 'It is a bit confusing at first, I know -

but welcome to our humble home, all the same.'

'What home?' Patricia stammered, brain feeling like a sponge. She

tried to sit up, remembered too late that her bones had been shattered,

then realised they had mended. She didn't know whether to feel

relieved or apprehensive. 'What happened to me? How did I get here?'

'You died, of course,' said the woman. 'You died and came here.'

'To the next stage of being,' said the man, with a reassuring smile.

'I'm Richard Ferris, and this is my wife, Jean. So pleased to meet

you.'

The beast cannoned into the Doctor's side. He was floored, caught off-

guard by the speed and ferocity of the attack. Nyssa screamed. The

Doctor was on his back, struggling to keep jaws from clamping about

his throat. Saliva cascaded over jagged teeth.

Nyssa felt as if she was moving at half-speed, too slow to save her

friend. It took seconds to find a hefty enough stick; more to wrench it

from the sodden undergrowth.

The Doctor caught hold of the beast's neck. It pulled free. Its head



swooped again. He batted it away with an elbow. Unhurt, it resumed its

attack.

With a whimper, Nyssa drove the stick down, over and over, into

the monster's hide. Droplets of water erupted from matted fur. The

beast cast its head about, snapping for the stick until it caught it and

yanked it from Nyssa's hands. The Doctor seized his opportunity to

send it sliding into the mud, claws scrabbling to gain purchase. It was

wary of them now, torn between their soft meat scent and the safety of

retreat. The Doctor ushered Nyssa behind him, and they backed away

together. His blond hair was plastered down, the pastel colours of his

cricketing outfit lost beneath the greens and browns of the forest. His

expression was intense and unsure. For long seconds, the only sound

was that of rain. Despite the shelter of leaves, Nyssa felt cold water

dribbling into her velvet suit. She suppressed a shudder,  
until the beast

was out of sight behind the trees.

When at last it was, the Doctor turned to her and whispered:  
'Back

to the TARDIS?'

'The TARDIS,' she agreed with feeling.

They turned - and froze, at the sound of a feral cry from in  
front of

them. Another beast. Nearby.

The Doctor's haunted eyes belied his casual tone. 'Or we  
could see

what lies *this* way.'

Lightning bleached the world for an instant. A peal of  
thunder

followed, too loud, too close, for Nyssa's liking. The rain bore  
down

with increased intensity. She was glad to see that the forest  
was

beginning to thin out at last, although it meant losing its  
protection

from the downpour.

They had discussed the wolf-thing in subdued tones; had  
agreed that

neither of them had encountered its species before. 'It seems the

TARDIS has brought us somewhere new,' the Doctor had mused.

'Now, if only the old girl could tell me where - and why.'

They stepped beyond the tree line, and a wonderful sight caused

Nyssa to forget her weariness. A building. Shelter.

'Doctor, look!'

He had seen it too - or, at least, its shadow against the overcast

evening sky. It was a hulking structure: an imposing, asymmetrical

conglomeration of turrets and wings. As they gazed upon it, another

fork of lightning filled in the silhouette for them.

Nyssa was struck by the building's sad condition. In its prime, she

could imagine it had once served as a country mansion, a home to the

rich. Time had taken its toll, eroding stonework and causing walls to

crumble. Vegetation grew in ever-widening cracks and deepening holes.

It evoked an unwelcome sense of regret. She was reminded that the

march of time was inexorable; that years gone by could never be

reclaimed. She thought of her home world, Traken.

Soon, they were standing before a pitted wooden door, to which

decades of neglect clung fiercely. Conversely, the brass doorknocker

with its lion's head motif gleamed proudly. Nyssa could see her own

bedraggled reflection, warped by its camber.

'Well, it looks as if somebody lives here, at least.' The Doctor lifted

the knocker, but paused and frowned.

'What is it?'

'Just a thought. A rather worrying one. We assumed those beasts in

the forest were trying to herd us away from their territory.'

'But?'

'What if their intention was to do the opposite?'

Nyssa had been uncomfortable enough even without the shard of

fear that the Doctor words sent slithering down her back.

His eyes remained distant for a moment. Then, shaking off his

foreboding as if he could just box it away for future reference, he faced

their situation with renewed confidence.

'Let's see if we can wake somebody up, shall we?'

Three great cracks snapped Patricia out of her doze. She had dreamed

of home and, for a second, did not know where she was. Then her

mind sorted memory from fiction, and a familiar weight settled upon

her heart.

She was cold, although she had been sleeping in the long, red dress

that she had dug out of an old chest. She sat on her bed, stared up at

the wooden timbers, and resumed her furious attempts to think of a

way to escape from this damnable house.

The knocking came again, and merged with thunder from without.

Somebody was at the door.

The police, come to find her? A concerned neighbour? Hope surged

through Patricia like electricity, jolting her into action. She hurried out

of her room, along the corridor and on to the balcony from which she

could peer down into the great hall, three floors below. She held her

breath as the door opened. She had never seen that door open before.

She thought about dashing down the stairs; hurtling through it before

anyone could stop her. But fear froze her. Fear and logic. How far

could she get?

'You see, Nyssa?' said the Doctor with deliberate cheer. 'The door was

unlocked all along.' He strode into the hallway. '"Knock, knock, knock

and it shall be opened unto you." Now, I wonder if anyone's home?' He

glanced around, taking in the threadbare carpet on the grand staircase,

the faded paintings and the chandelier glinting in the flames of newly lit

candles. Despite its musty odour, the house had had recent occupants.

He cupped his hands to his mouth and yelled: 'Hello?'

A crash punctuated the echoes of his call. He and Nyssa whirled

around to see that the door behind them had slammed shut. A freak air

current, perhaps. They exchanged brief, worried glances. The

temperature seemed to drop.

'Doctor?'

'Nothing to worry about, Nyssa, it's only an old house.' He didn't

meet her eyes. He had to take her mind off the cold, the dark, the air

of gloom. His own mind too. He was reminded of an uncomfortable

part of his past. On Gallifrey.

In search of distraction, his eyes alighted upon a painting by the

door. 'Oh, I say, that's rather interesting.'

Nyssa frowned as they moved to inspect it. 'A picture of a skull?'

'Ah, but do you see those lumps on its temples?'

'Horns?'

'Precisely. And yet, it appears otherwise human.'

'It's only an old painting,' Nyssa pointed out.

'I wonder.' The Doctor pulled at his lower lip and tried to focus on

insubstantial thoughts. He stared into a pair of blank eye sockets and,

for a second, was drifting alone in a void.

He heard Nyssa's gasp of surprise, as if from the end of a long

tunnel.

He tore himself away from the bleak image, and felt a wrench as he

returned to a world that had seemed momentarily distant and unreal.

He blinked. He followed Nyssa's startled gaze. He saw the elderly

couple.

The couple smiled in unison.

A clock ticked softly in the drawing room. Plush velvet curtains

shielded the room from the storm raging outside.



Jean Ferris offered to make tea, and the Doctor accepted gratefully.

Nyssa dried herself by the fire in the open grate. As Jean collected a

soot-black kettle from atop the sideboard, her husband Richard drew

her to one side.

'Two new arrivals?' he whispered urgently. 'Two?'

Jean looked at him with dead eyes and an impenetrable expression.

Then, seeing the Doctor's inquisitive look, she forced a smile. She hung

the kettle over the fire, and asked the new arrivals what had brought

them here.

'Oh, just exploring really,' the Doctor lied breezily. 'We got caught in

the storm.'

Jean shook her head and tutted softly. 'Exposure to the elements. I

see. You should have taken an umbrella, young man.'

'Well, it wasn't raining when we came out,' he said defensively.

'Where are we exactly?' asked Nyssa.

'This is Carnon Manor, dear,' said Jean.

'But where is that?'

Richard and Jean Ferris glanced at each other, but didn't answer.

The Doctor studied their body language. They were nervous, but not

overly so. Tired, perhaps. Or weary. They posed no immediate threat.

But there was something sinister about the couple.

'May we stay here,' he asked, 'until the storm passes?'

That look again.

'We'd be no trouble,' he continued, as if he hadn't seen it. He stuffed

his hands into his pockets and gave them his appealing, little-boy-lost

routine. 'We'll leave as soon as it's light.'

'There is no light here,' said Richard. 'The storm doesn't pass.'

His words were underscored by a fierce thunderclap. A china ornament on the mantelpiece rattled in sympathy. Candles flickered as

cold tendrils of wind crept around the window frame.

Jean's face fell. 'Oh dear, you really don't understand, do you? How

do you think you arrived at this house?'

'Well, I rather thought through the front door.'

'That's not possible!' snapped Richard, with a sudden and unexpected severity.

'There is only one way to reach Carnon Manor, dear,' said Jean. 'I

am very much afraid you both died in this forest of yours.'

Steam whistled from the spout of the kettle, and she moved to fetch

it. 'Now, does anyone take sugar?'

China rattled and flames flickered again. This time, there was no

doubting that the building had trembled, just slightly.

They sat and sipped tea from dainty cups. The Doctor chatted

casually, about the weather and all manner of nothing. Nyssa could not

settle. It was something about this place. The decor, the candlelight, the

storm. Its occupants too. She imagined creatures pouncing from the

shadows in the corners of the room. She glimpsed a leather-winged

monstrosity, swooping for her neck. She turned sharply, but it was a

flapping curtain.

She was not one to surrender so to unscientific fears.

Even so, she jumped, spilling tea into her lap, as the door flew open.

A wide-eyed, wild-haired teenaged boy hurtled through it, and stopped

short. For a moment, his chin trembled too much for him to speak.

'What is it, Douglas dear?' asked Jean.

'M-Melissa was right. She said.. the creature. It's started. There are

two of them. Two. My God, my God.. '

The Doctor gave him a friendly smile. 'Hello.'

The boy's face crumpled. He turned and fled from the room.

'Oh dear,' said the Doctor, 'it seems we haven't made a very good

first impression.'

'Young Douglas is somewhat distraught,' said Jean. 'It's just his way,

I'm afraid.'

'Who else lives here?' the Doctor asked.

'Well, there's Dr Morton. We don't see much of him; he hides himself away in his lab. There's Melissa - she'll find you soon enough,

you'll get used to her - and that smart young woman, Patricia. Always in

a rush. She's new here, she'll learn.'

'And Lord Carnon, of course,' said Richard. 'He owns the house.'

'Hmm. Does he now?'

Nyssa could restrain herself no longer. 'What did the boy mean,' she

blurted out, 'about a creature? About something starting?'

The Doctor glared at her disapprovingly and the Ferrises clammed

up. 'What was he so scared of?' cried Nyssa.

'I've been on edge since we arrived here,' she explained later, in the

generously proportioned bedroom to which the Ferrises had directed

her. 'I don't know why.' She sighed, and sat on her impressive four-

poster bed. She sank into its mattress, feeling weary.

'It's understandable.' The Doctor stood at the window, and observed

the patterns of the storm. 'Thunder and lightning. A young couple in

search of shelter. A Gothic mansion with strange occupants. How

many times have you seen this scenario in old horror movies?'

'We didn't have "horror movies" on Traken.' Nyssa's best friend,

Tegan, had explained the genre to her once. She had been repelled.

Such glorification of evil and violence was alien to her culture.

A frown crossed the Doctor's face as he turned to her. 'No, you

didn't, did you? The iconography is Earth-specific, then.'

'You're saying that all this - this building, this environment - has

been engineered by someone, to trigger primitive fear responses?'

'Perhaps.'

'Do you feel it too?'

'I can feel that there are. .forces at work here, yes,' muttered the

Doctor. He could be every bit as evasive as the Ferrises when quizzed

about his feelings, or his past.

Nyssa was sure that he would not answer her next question, but she

had to ask it. 'What frightens you, Doctor?'

The lights of Traken grew dim.

Nyssa clung to her mother's skirts as the protective dome dwindled

around them. There were Melkurs in the night beyond; evil spirits that

lived only to vanquish the Union's goodness. Though she could not see

them, she knew that each bore the face of the man who had slain her

father and destroyed her world. Many Trakenites had fallen from the

shelter of the dome already. The Doctor was there, providing comfort,

but he was so vulnerable himself.

The lights went out.

Nyssa screamed as she jerked upright in the bed in Carnon Manor.

Her scream turned into a stifled gasp as she realised that somebody else

was present. A woman, thirty-something, hair tied back into a neat bun.

The woman leapt back, startled. Then, composing herself, she spread

out her hands in a placatory gesture.

'I'm not here to hurt you.'

'Who are you?'

'Patricia. Patricia Hopkins. I've been held here for three days.'

'You're a captive?'

'Please say you can help me. I must get out of this madhouse, before

I'm driven as insane as all the others!'

If the rest of Carnon Manor was patterned after a generic horror

movie, then Dr Morton's laboratory came off the set of *Frankenstein*.

Coloured liquids boiled in glass beakers, connected by copper pipes. A

sulphurous odour pervaded the air.



The Doctor inspected the equipment with casual interest.  
Morton

hadn't heard his approach. A middle-aged man whose  
remaining hair

had prematurely greyed, he perched on a stool in a stained  
lab coat,

mumbling to himself as he scribbled on a pad. Discarded  
balls of paper

were strewn about the floor, a few spent biros amongst  
them.

The Doctor cleared his throat politely.

'Yes, yes, what is it? Can't you see I'm busy?'

The Doctor peered over Morton's shoulder and spotted a  
small

error in his equations. 'Six,' he corrected, pointing it out.  
Morton

stopped his frantic writing, glared at the offending number  
and, with

bad grace, tore the sheet from the pad and flung it across  
the room.

'Well, there was no need to go quite that far.'

'It was useless,' said Morton sulkily. 'Always useless. So close  
to

making a breakthrough - so close - can't afford to make such  
basic

mistakes!' He banged a fist into his bench.

'Then perhaps you should get some rest. It is nearly five o'clock, you

know.'

Morton looked at the Doctor for the first time. His eyes were red-

rimmed, but the fervour in them blazed just as red. 'No time to rest.

Don't know how long I've got. Been given a second chance, you know.

Can't squander it.'

From somewhere in the bowels of the house, a clock struck the

hour. Morton levered himself to his feet and moved, as if sleepwalking,

to where a Bunsen burner heated a clear solution in a beaker atop a

tripod. He turned off the flame, peered myopically at the liquid and

sighed. Deflated, he sank onto another stool and rubbed his eyes.

'What are you trying to do?' the Doctor asked. 'I might be able to

help, you know.'

'Cancer,' Morton answered, almost voicelessly.

'Ah.'

'I'm trying to find a cure.'

The Doctor clapped him on the back; a hopeless gesture of support.

'Very worthy.'

'Not really,' said Morton. 'It's for my own benefit.'

'I see.' The Doctor pursed his lips, thinking long and hard before he

asked his next question. 'How long do you have?'

The bewildered look on Morton's face confirmed his suspicion,

before the man even spoke.

'I died two months ago,' he said woodenly.

The clock stood at half-past eight, but the darkness hadn't lifted. Rain

still lashed the windows. Clouds painted the sky black. Patricia assured

her new friends that the thunderstorm never ended.

They had searched the house - Patricia, Nyssa and the Doctor -

familiarising themselves with its tortuous layout before coming to rest

in a small, out-of-the-way study, where they talked.

Patricia was surprised when the Doctor asked her from which world

and time she hailed. She told him, because she had begun to believe

that he was her only hope. He didn't seem much, but his contemplative

manner gave the impression that he secreted all the knowledge in the

world.

'I expected as much,' he muttered. 'It seems that all the residents are

from Earth, 1999.'

'Is that significant?' asked Nyssa.

'Perhaps.' The Doctor turned to Patricia. 'Has anybody said anything

to you? Any clues about where we might be?'

She shook her head quickly, shutting her mind to the unnerving

claims of Richard and Jean. 'The old couple talk in riddles. I think they

enjoy scaring people. So does Melissa Hamilton: a spiteful, horrible

child. The boy, Doug Williams, hasn't said anything coherent at all.'

'Hmm. I spoke to the other resident, Doctor Morton, earlier. A sad

man, driven by a futile cause. He supported the Ferrises' claim, by the

way.' The Doctor looked directly at Patricia as he said this. She

shivered. 'He says he died too. It seems that Nyssa and I are the only

people here who didn't.'

'I won't accept that we are in some sort of afterlife,' insisted Patricia.

She couldn't accept it. There would be no escape, in that case.

'No, nor will I,' said the Doctor. 'Not yet.' He sprung to his feet,

newly charged with energy. 'Time to leave, I think.'

He breezed out of the room, and Nyssa followed without complaint

as if she was used to so doing. Patricia felt hopeful, but she dispelled

the cruel sensation with reason. She had tried to leave Carnon Manor

before, without success. She had told the Doctor as much, but he could

not have listened.

He couldn't lead them out of here so easily. Could he?

As they approached the front door, the Doctor motioned to the

women to stay back. He stepped forward, tentatively at first and then

with more confidence. His hand tingled as he reached for the knob, as

if the air around it was charged. An illusion. The effect of a low-grade

telepathic force field, simple for a Time Lord to resist. He smiled.

And felt a dreadful pressure in his mind.

His attention was dragged to the source of the assault. He stared

into the skull painting, reeling beneath the energies that radiated from

its hollow eyes. His soul was turned inside out.

He didn't remember falling, and yet he was on the floor. He

massaged his temples, blinking as a cloud of pain dispersed in his head.

Nyssa asked how he felt. Instead of answering, he put a question of his

own to Patricia. 'Did this happen to you?'

'Not exactly. I just couldn't reach the knob. I did tell you that.'

He nodded. 'Windows?'

'Unbreakable glass.'

'I doubt it - but impervious, all the same.'

'Then we are trapped in here?' asked Nyssa.

'For now.'

They found the topmost room of the house and, from there, emerged

on to a narrow outside parapet. Though assaulted by the elements, they

were grateful for the fresh air. Nyssa peered over the edge, but could

not see the ground, through darkness and mist.

'We couldn't climb down there,' she concluded. 'Could we?'

She wanted, against all logic, to believe that they could. She wanted

the Doctor to find a way.

'I'd be surprised,' he said. 'Somebody's gone to an awful lot of

trouble to keep us in this house. If the weather itself is under their

control - and I suspect it is - we can expect it to work against us. The

attempt could be fatal. That's even if we could find a long enough

rope.'

It seemed too much for Patricia. 'What are they trying to do to us?'

she cried. 'They've just left this open as a torment, to. .to show us what

they're keeping from us!'

'I think you're right,' said the Doctor.

'There are three of us. Why can't we confront those people, Richard

and Jean, force them to tell us the way out of here?'

'I shouldn't imagine they actually know.'

Patricia gave a moan of anger and frustration, turned, and pushed

her way back inside.

'I had that impression too,' said Nyssa, raising her voice to be heard

over the wind and the rain. 'I don't think the Ferrises understand this



place any more than we do. I think they're prisoners here like

everybody else.'

She expected the Doctor to respond, but he was silent. She looked,

and saw that he was staring into the distance.

'Evil,' he said, his voice little more than a murmur but carrying

clearly. 'Evil, festering in the cracks of the universe, while those who

could challenge it sit idly by, not caring. Not seeing it in time. Not

being strong enough to hold back the black tide.' He turned to her, as

lost and uncertain as she had ever seen him.

Nyssa had survived many perils with the Doctor. She had confidence in him, believed in him, or she couldn't have gone on. But

sometimes, her faith was shaken. Sometimes, when he didn't believe in

himself.

'You asked what frightens me,' he said hollowly.

The building gave its most protracted and violent tremor yet.

Patricia did not recognise her surroundings; could not remember how

she had come to them. The corridors of this godforsaken house

seemed to shift each time she walked them.

She had to think clearly; take control. This frightened, weeping,

dependent girl was not her. Not the tough-hearted executive who had

won success through determination. She composed herself, wiped tears

from her face and marched around the next corner. She screamed as

Doug Williams barrelled into her, knocking her against the far wall and

onto the floor.

Fear turned to embarrassment, and then anger. 'You should learn to

watch -' she began, glowering up at him. Her throat was stopped by the

terror in his eyes.

'It's coming,' he whispered hoarsely. 'I can feel it!'

The springs of the rocking chair creaked as Jean Ferris swayed to and

fro. She stared at the ceiling and sipped her tea. Richard hovered by the

door, occasionally crossing the room to move something on the

mantelpiece or to straighten a picture.

'Carnon Manor,' said Jean, 'is a brief respite on the voyage to oblivion. That's how Nicholas refers to it.'

The Doctor cocked an eyebrow. 'Nicholas?'

'Lord Carnon.'

'We haven't met him yet,' said Nyssa.

'He comes and goes as he pleases,' Richard put in gruffly. Nyssa and

the Doctor exchanged a hopeful look.

'A half-way house to the other side,' said Jean. She was almost

talking to herself, and Nyssa had to strain to hear her. 'We are brought

here when we die. Eventually, we shall leave. For whatever else awaits

us. The creature will take us there.'

'The creature?' prompted the Doctor, leaning forward, making no

attempt to hide his eagerness.

'In the cellar.' said Richard.

'It is stirring,' said Jean, in the same quiet, haunted voice.

'The house

feels it. The creature always stirs when we are too many.

Carnon Manor

will hold only six guests. There are eight of us now.'

'So this creature will manifest itself in the house?' said the Doctor. 'It

will take two people? It will.. kill them?'

'We don't see it,' said Richard, a hint of resentment filtering into his

voice. 'We can't stop it.'

The couple seemed resigned to their fates. So placid.. Nyssa couldn't

understand them. 'We could at least try!'

Jean chuckled softly. 'I don't think it will take us, dear. You are too

new here. And Richard and I, well, we are too old. We have lived here

for decades now.'

'The creature favours us.'

But Jean's knuckles were white on the arms of her chair.  
Richard

made to move an ornament, and knocked it into the hearth instead.

Nyssa watched them both through narrowed eyes, and knew that they

did not believe their own assurances.

'We have to get out of here,' Doug insisted. 'We have to get out before

it's too late!'

'That's hardly news to me,' said Patricia drily.

'We have to get *out*,' Doug cried, more earnestly.

'And you know a way, do you?'

'Just one way. Just one.'

Doug turned and fled. Patricia scrambled to her feet. The boy was

deranged with fear, she told herself. He couldn't even know what he

was saying. She ran after him anyway, saddened by the thought that

false hope was better than none. She was desperate. So too was Doug.

She realised too late what he had planned. She called after him in

vain as he mounted the stairs to the tower room, gaining ground on her

with every step.

A curtain billowed in the wind. Patricia rushed out through the open

door, recoiling from the rain's stinging greeting. Shielding her eyes, she

made out Doug's form, a silhouette against the stormy sky. He stood

precariously on the balcony rail, shaking.

Patricia had always imagined herself staying cool in such a crisis; able

to use common sense, to talk the boy down. Instead, she shouted

something ill-judged about his cowardice. It was blown back to her on

the wind.

She reached out to him, but it was too late.

Doug Williams leapt into the storm.

The Doctor tried to provoke Dr Morton into action. 'Your work will

mean nothing,' he insisted, 'if you can't take it to where it is needed.'

'There will be a way. Fate has provided thus far.'

'We have to learn the secret of this house. We have to find out why

some mysterious creature is killing its occupants.'

'We are dead already, Doctor. I only know that I have been given a

chance beyond death.'

'And don't you want to know why? Aren't you curious?'

Morton had eyes only for his test tubes.

'What if the creature takes you next?'

Morton shook his head. 'It would not be logical. I have been given

this chance to complete my work and I am close to so doing. Why

should it be snatched from me?'

'Fate can be capricious,' the Doctor warned. 'And some of us,' he

added as a parting shot, 'aren't dead yet.'

Nyssa had been resting, hoping to ease the dull pain in her head.

Something about Carnon Manor seemed to sap her reserves. But she

could not sleep.

She found herself wandering, in a semi-daze, around the house. She

was looking for the Doctor, Patricia, anyone. She found only distorted

shadows, leering in the deceptive candlelight.

She descended a flight of stairs to the ground floor.  
Although she

had explored before, she did not recognise this hallway.

The house shook again and she almost fell. Jerked into alertness, she

watched as, in seeming slow motion, a dislodged candle pirouetted to

the floor. Improbably, its flame survived and caught in the dry carpet.

Nyssa half wanted to see this building burn, but feared she would be

trapped inside as it did. She looked for something with which to

smother the fire, and ripped a dusty tapestry from the wall. She threw it

down and jumped on it, until smoke no longer seeped from its edges.

Turning, she saw for the first time that she had uncovered a door

beneath the stairs. Richard Ferris's words came back to her, and she



knew that she had found the entrance to the cellar. The cellar in which

the creature lurked.

Nyssa stared at the door for what seemed like an age. She was

curious about what lay beyond. No, more than that, she wanted to

overcome her fears, to pull open the door, to reveal the rational,

scientific explanation for all this that was being kept from her.

The fear was too strong. She could not make herself move.

'Still fighting against it, girlie?'

Nyssa whirled, surprised that somebody could have crept up on her.

She saw a young woman, dressed in black, white make-up plastered

over her face, an ankh design tattooed on her left cheek. She sneered,

and light glinted off gold rings in her lip. 'They all fight it at first. They

look for ways out of the house, explanations for what goes on inside.

They don't find them. After a few years, they accept it: those who aren't

driven mad.'

Nyssa swallowed and tried to sound in control. 'You must be Melissa. I was told about you.'

The woman scowled. 'Oh, were you, girlie? I suppose they told you

to beware of poor Melissa; too common for your upper-class clothes

and speech and pretty-pretty little face. You won't last a week here,

girlie. You'll crack, like all the spoilt ones do.'

'At least I'm trying to do something constructive. I won't just accept

being trapped here!'

Melissa threw back her head and laughed: a hard, spiteful cackle

which stoked a resentful anger in Nyssa. She was almost grateful for it.

It overcame the fear. She let it carry her forward. 'Laugh all you like. I'll

find a way out of this house, without your help!' She turned the handle

and yanked the door open.

To Melissa's delight, she revealed only a brick wall.

Patricia was in the drawing room, with the Doctor and the Ferrises,

nursing one of Jean's cups of tea and trying to appear strong. It irked

her that Richard and Jean seemed not to be upset by Doug's suicide. A

part of her wanted to be so emotionless, so centred. She had been,

once.

'My dear,' said Jean, 'young Douglas didn't die today.'

'Because he was dead already?' snapped Patricia. 'Don't give me that

afterlife crap!'

The woman laughed. 'You misunderstand, dear. Douglas could not

have left here. The decision is not ours to take.'

'Well, he took it all right. He couldn't have survived that fall.'

The Doctor leaned forward, staring at Jean intently. 'What are you

saying? That Doug Williams is alive?'

Richard barked a short, cruel laugh. 'Not alive, exactly.'

They found him in the spacious kitchen, where the Doctor had

promised to fix a long overdue meal for Nyssa and Patricia,  
and for

anybody else who was interested. Patricia took two breaths,  
then turned

and fled. The Doctor understood her reaction. Most of what  
they had

seen could be explained somehow. The claims of the  
residents did not

have to be believed. But Doug Williams had died - and yet,  
here he was,

seated upon a stool, pale and quiet but most definitely alive.  
How could

science explain that?

'Is something wrong with Patricia?' asked Doug, and the  
Doctor was

struck by his calmness. He could almost have been sedated.

He buried his hands in his pockets. 'I think there has been a  
slight

misunderstanding. She rather had the impression that you  
died.'

Doug shrugged indifferently. 'We all did, didn't we?'

The creature came for Dr Donald Morton in the small hours  
of the

next morning. It was heralded by an almighty tremor, and by  
an awful

sense of loss. Nyssa knew that Morton had gone, and grieved although

she had never met him. She found herself slipping on her shoes and

wandering to the top of the main staircase, where she discovered the

Doctor, Patricia and Jean.

'I take it we all felt the same thing?' said the Doctor.

'Everybody felt it,' said Jean, in a dulled voice. 'Morton has been

taken. You responded because you are still new. In time, you will react

as they all do. You will turn over in your sleep, and you will rest more

easily through relief that the creature did not take you. I alone maintain

a vigil for those who have passed beyond.'

The Doctor stared at her, and seemed lost for words. At last,

without speaking, he turned and hared down the stairs. Nyssa called to

him, but he ignored her. She followed him instinctively.

When the next tremor came, she was caught unprepared. She missed

her footing and pitched headlong, screaming.

Somehow the Doctor was beneath her, breaking her fall. She held

on to him gratefully. Glancing up, she saw that Patricia had taken a few

tentative steps towards them, drawn by her plight. She had stopped

now, uncertain again. Jean had not moved.

'There is no rest for the creature today,' she intoned. 'Lord Carnon

allows only six guests to reside in his house. One more must leave.'

The Doctor scowled and, pushing Nyssa aside, hurried on. She

dogged his heels determinedly as he darted along passages and tore

open doors, sometimes bobbing into a room and back out again,

sometimes hurtling through one. They came to the drawing room,

finally, though it was not where Nyssa remembered it as being.

There, the Doctor halted at last, though his head jerked from side to

side, eyes searching, body restless but deprived of purpose.

'What is it, Doctor?' Nyssa asked, when she had recovered breath to

speak. 'What are you looking for?'

'Dr Morton's laboratory. It's gone. I had hoped to examine it, to find

some clue to the nature of this creature, but it's gone.'

'The configuration of the house keeps changing.' Nyssa spoke the

words absently, more concerned with watching the Doctor. She knew

he was much older than he appeared, but this was the first time she had

believed it of this particular incarnation. He rubbed his eyes with the

fingers of one hand, and gritted his teeth with the effort of thought.

'There's no logic to this place. Events occurring at random, things

making no sense. I can't operate without logic.'

'You need to rest.' Nyssa's voice trembled with the fear that rest

might not be enough. 'You haven't slept at all yet.'

The Doctor seemed almost outraged by the suggestion. As if to

disprove her words, he jerked into motion, although he could only pace

the room impotently. 'Time could be of the essence. We're dealing with

an unknown foe. Why does he want us here? What are his plans?' He

pivoted to face Nyssa, his eyes alight. His words came in staccato

bursts, through a barely contained panic that robbed him of breath.

'What - what terrible evils are being let loose upon the universe now, as

we stand here talking about sleep?'

'Doctor. .'

'What if I can't escape? What if I'm not strong enough?'

Nyssa burst into tears. 'You're scaring me, Doctor. I trust you, and

you've given up!'

The Doctor fell silent and suddenly Nyssa was aware of what she

had done. She felt stupid and immature. She had not cried since. . since

Traken and the Master. She controlled herself and looked up at him,



expecting to see disappointment in his expression. Instead, he was just

surprised, as if her outburst had shocked him out of his own uncharacteristic behaviour. He produced a handkerchief and dabbed the

tears from her cheeks, the kindly gentleman again.

'This house manipulates our emotions,' he deduced, his voice calm

but strained. 'It's more than the obvious trappings. It's the secrets, the

disparate characters with whom we're confined, the whole "land

beyond death" scenario, the creature. And perhaps more. It began with

the beast in the forest. Whoever is behind this, they don't just want us

imprisoned. They want us scared.'

'They're doing a good job,' said Nyssa, forcing a laugh through her

embarrassment.

'I think, perhaps, we both need to sleep.'

'I wish I could! This place gives me nightmares. I feel like I'm being

watched all the time.'

The Doctor said nothing, but Nyssa could tell that she had launched

a train of thought.

Another day ground by in Carnon Manor.

The Doctor spent most of it in silent contemplation, punctuated by

manic bursts of energy in which he sought out other residents and

questioned them, often about their absent landlord.

Doug remained subdued and amnesiac. He knew nothing of his

suicide bid, so could not explain his resurrection. Patricia kept away

from him. She maintained that she was coping, while her capable façade

continued to peel.

The normally placid Ferrises erupted into a flaming row and crockery was thrown. So far as anyone could tell, there was no reason

for it. Melissa laughed and assured Nyssa that such incidents were

commonplace. The strain, she said, told on everybody in one way or

another. She hinted that, were it not for the couple's tempers, they

would not have survived so long.

Nyssa clung on to her faith in the Doctor. He was acting more like

his old self, but everything about Carnon Manor conspired to challenge

her confidence. In him. In everything.

There was still no sign of Lord Carnon, but the creature in the cellar

continued to make its presence felt. The house shook at ever more

frequent intervals. Richard opined that it would not be long before it

came for its next victim.

The Doctor began to form a theory.

He slept, at last.

His dreams presented him with a bus terminal. A woman's voice

droned from a broken loudspeaker, corrupted by an electrical buzz.

Fumes swathed the Doctor's feet in a blue haze. Wind blew and

scattered refuse. Human refuse drifted through, or waited in queues.

Though he never saw their faces, he knew they were watching him.

He confronted one woman, but she tightened her headscarf and

hurried on by. A harried driver called over his shoulder that he was

running too late to deal with passengers. A drunk, sprawled across a

bench with two slats missing, swore and rolled on to his side.

The Doctor found a window marked 'Information' and rapped on

the glass. The attendant didn't look up. He was shuffling papers, his

features obscured by a peaked cap and poor lighting. 'What do you

want?' he asked rudely.

'Well - information, please.'

'The 68 goes in forty minutes. Bedfordshire, calling at REM State.

You want a ticket?'

'I was thinking of something rather more profound than a bus

timetable'

'Oh yeah? Like what, for instance?'

'Like, what are you doing in my dream?'

The man ceased his work and was still, for a moment. Then he

raised his head. His skin was chalky, his face angular and pinched. His

eyes were a penetrating green, and a cruel smile twisted his lips.

'Your mind is a fascinating place to visit, Doctor.'

'But you wouldn't want to live here, I know.' The Doctor met the

attendant's stare evenly. He had expected this, to find a man known by

all, apparently seen by no one. 'Lord Nicholas Carnon, I presume?'

The house shook again, and Patricia knew.

She was in the library, ostensibly to check for references to Carnon

Manor. Instead, she had quizzed Nyssa about the Doctor. Despite his

promises, he had failed to help them thus far. She wanted some

reassurance that he was not wasting her time.

But now she knew.

She looked at her colleague and saw that she too had had the

dreadful premonition. There was fear in Nyssa's eyes. Patricia felt a

pang of sympathetic horror.

The creature wanted Nyssa.

They ran. It crossed Patricia's mind that she needn't have done so.

She was in no danger. A week ago, perhaps, she would have left the girl

to her fate. Not her business. But then, a week ago she would have

known the futility of running too.

The final quake knocked them off their feet, before they had gone a

dozen paces. The creature burst into the corridor, oozing through its

walls. A great amorphous blob, in the depths of which Patricia could

see a vast panorama of stars. No living organism, this. She didn't know

how, but she knew that she was looking at a vast spatial distortion; a

hole punched through reality's surface.

Patricia's throat constricted as the distortion surged over her, but

she felt only a static tingle. She was not its target.

Nyssa was engulfed, and her helpless screams seemed to echo

through the fabric of time.

Then the corridor was empty, but for Patricia Hopkins, and she

screamed too.

The passengers all bore Carnon's face, as did the drivers, the conductors and the woman in the ticket office.

'A life in eternity can be so empty, you see,' explained a man in a

business suit as the Doctor strolled alongside him. 'You dwellers in time

have such vivid imaginations. Your emotions, your interactions, your

sense of your own mortality; it all makes for very entertaining thoughts.'

'You're talking about living beings!' the Doctor protested, but the

businessman walked on and ignored him.

He was answered by a youth who sat on a bench, his eyes closed as

a tinny beat issued from his headphones. 'I'm talking about those who

have died already.'

'I've made a deal, you see.' This from a bearded inspector, who

counted the queues and wrote on his clipboard as he spoke. 'A deal

with an entity more powerful than even my kind.'

'Oh?'

'I am allowed to borrow six souls,' said a young woman as she

bustled by, late for her bus. The Doctor jogged after her. She spoke in

Carnon's voice, without any sign that her exertions were telling. 'I bring

them here, to where I can stimulate their emotional responses. When

they cease to entertain me, I replace them.'

'As you did Dr Morton?'

'A poignant case, I thought,' said Carnon, with regret, 'but he failed

to interact with the other characters. He was useless to me.'



The woman caught her bus, and the Doctor turned to find the next

vessel for Carnon's intelligence. A small boy with a red balloon grinned

up at him.

The Doctor crouched beside him. 'And where do I fit in?'

'Entertainment has its price, Doctor,' said the boy, 'and I have

something in my grasp that my, ah, business partner has been denied

many times.'

'I.. see.'

The Doctor stood and turned to find the inspector again. 'As

payment for her loan to me,' said the latest aspect of Nicholas Carnon,

'Death wants you!'

Drawn by inexplicable urges, the residents had gathered in the

drawing room to meet the owner of the house. Lord Carnon was

splendid in top hat and black robes, and Patricia felt that she already

knew him, though it was not possible. She did know that, mere days

ago, she would have challenged him, lambasted him, demanded release

from this hellish prison. Instead, she sat and listened with the rest. She

felt numb, and wondered if the others had been right. She was

becoming inured to Carnon Manor; beginning to accept it.

'The Doctor has cheated Death many times,' pronounced Carnon.

'She insists that he take his rightful place with her. In return, she is

prepared to grant a considerable boon.'

He explained, and Patricia felt new hope blossoming in her heart.

New hope, and something else: disgust with herself, for feeling it.

These, then, were the details.

The Ferrises, Douglas Williams, Melissa Hamilton, Patricia Hopkins

- Death was prepared to renounce her claim on them all. She would do

this in return for one prized soul; one that she could not take while its

owner still clung on to existence.

Lord Carnon had gone now, though Patricia had not seen him leave.

She looked at the others, saw their hope, their greed, their malice, and

knew that they had made the logical choice.

If only the Doctor died, then everybody else could live.

The bus station grew like an organic thing, until the Doctor was

trapped in a maze of shifting passages. He ran, and tried to ignore the

battered posters on which a grinning skeleton extended a finger above

the slogan *Death Wants You!* .

He denied his fear, suppressing the chemical reaction in his brain

that caused it. He concentrated, knowing that his fate lay in his ability to

wake.

He wrenched his eyes open, felt the pressure of hands on his throat,

looked up into Doug Williams' fanatical eyes and knew that he was

being choked to death.

He reacted quickly, putting his respiratory bypass system on standby

and pushing up hard. The boy had little strength, and he was easily

flung off the couch. The Doctor swung himself into a standing

position, alert for his next move.

Doug whimpered in frustration, and tackled the Doctor around the

legs. They crashed into the carpet together and rolled. The Doctor was

gasping out words, wanting to know what had precipitated this attack.

Tears streamed from Doug's eyes, and he couldn't answer.

Ending it was harder than the Doctor had anticipated. The boy was

thin and lithe, and he twisted and wriggled until at last the Doctor

managed to find the nerve cluster at the base of his neck. His eyes slid

into their sockets and his head lolled. The Doctor lowered him gently,

his mind distracted by the suspicion that Carnon was responsible for

this. His nature uncovered, he had taken his twisted game to the next

level.

Nyssa!

The Doctor raced out of the reception room in which he had chosen to dream. He was back in the main hallway, and drawn to the

malevolent glare of the skull painting. Did he only imagine that its

lipless mouth had twisted into a sneer?

Melissa Hamilton was draped over the stair banister. 'Nowhere to

run to, Doctor,' she taunted. 'Nowhere to hide.'

'Where's Nyssa?' he snapped.

'Gone. The creature came for Miss High-and-Mighty. On your own

now, Doctor. Left to die.'

He fought down a surging dread at the thought of Nyssa's fate. He

didn't know what the creature was; couldn't guess what it had done to

her. She was intelligent. She might still be alive. Might.

'Lord Carnon's turned you all against me, hasn't he?'

'A bargain. Your life for ours. Five against one, Doctor.'

'Four,' he corrected.

'Doesn't matter. Be ready to die, Doctor. When you least expect.'

Melissa slipped away into the shadows.

Patricia walked down a wood-panelled corridor, hugging herself and

trying to deny that this was happening. The residents had split up to

find the Doctor. What if she found him first? The others might be

capable of murder, might have been here long enough to do even that

to escape, but she was not. She didn't have to be. Even without her, it

was four against one. She didn't have to dirty her hands; didn't have to

do anything but wait. Just wait. Then, when the Doctor was dead, she

would wake up on a London street and it would all have been a sick

nightmare.

Patricia hated herself.

The Doctor found the Ferrises in the drawing room. He had hoped to

take them by surprise, pre-empting their plans for him. But they had

not been hunting like the others. They had simply waited.

Richard closed the door behind the Doctor. Jean brandished the

boiling kettle, protected by an oven glove.

'We are frightfully sorry about this, dear,' she twittered, although her

expression said otherwise. 'We don't want to kill you. It just has to be.'

The Doctor backed away, trying to keep an eye on Richard, behind

him. 'You have a choice,' he insisted. 'You could say no.'

'The prize is too sweet for that.'

'And what makes you think Carnon won't betray you?'

'Does it matter? We have nothing to lose.'

Jean threw the kettle. The Doctor was prepared. He snatched an

embroidered cushion and flung it to intercept the missile. Hot water

erupted, creating spots of pain on the Doctor's skin. His defence had

cost him. The Ferrises pressed their attack in earnest.  
Richard was on

him, strangling him with a belt. Jean closed in with knitting  
needles,

stabbing, stabbing for his hearts, as he squirmed and tried  
to bat her

away with one hand, the other straining to break her  
husband's hold.

Desperate purpose had lent strength to Richard's aged  
muscles.

It could have ended then. It crossed the Doctor's mind that  
this

would be an ignominious way to die: having defeated Daleks  
and

Cybermen, to be murdered by two senior citizens in a  
haunted house.

Then something hit Richard from behind, and he dropped  
the belt.

Emitting a keening wail of pain and loss, he fell to his knees  
and

scrabbled after the makeshift weapon.

The Doctor had already recovered. Disarming Jean was  
simple. And

then he saw his rescuer for the first time. Patricia Hopkins.



'Thank you,' he murmured, breathing deeply as he loosened his

collar. She didn't meet his gaze. He wondered what dark thoughts she

had had to defeat before coming to her decision. In saving his life, he

realised, she had thrown away her own. His words of gratitude hung

between them, and seemed inadequate.

Jean Ferris sank to the floor by Richard's side. The couple were

drained, their faces grey and dead. Richard's hands ceased their

fumbling quest for the belt, and held Jean's tightly. Their chance had

passed. It didn't even seem worth the effort to bind them.

A deep-throated cackle alerted the Doctor to the fact that somebody

else was in the doorway. Melissa Hamilton.

He faced her, and locked eyes with her, ready for another fight.

Melissa shook her head and kept on laughing. And turned. And walked

away, the echoes of that laugh lingering long after mortal eyes saw her

for the final time.

'Of all of them..' ' the Doctor muttered, in surprised admiration. He

was beginning to remember why he held such affection for the people

of Earth.

'So,' Patricia said with a sigh, 'what happens now?'

'We wait, I think.'

The Doctor was in a sunlit meadow where birds sang a haunting

melody and a soft breeze wafted lush grass. The TARDIS stood at the

foot of a gentle slope and, to the Doctor's joy, Nyssa emerged from

within. She ran towards him happily and they embraced. No words

were needed yet.

The Doctor's memories of the house were fading. He could not be

sure what had happened there, especially at the end. There was an

image of Nicholas Carnon in his mind, screaming as his construct

tumbled; as a skeletal hand tore its way out of a dimension most vile

and seized him in a frigid grasp. He had failed to honour his bargain

and payment was due.

Or had the Doctor imagined it? A half-remembered scene from an

old movie, jumbled with the eerie images and ancient fears that Carnon

Manor had deliberately excavated?

'I understand that Death couldn't just take us while we were alive,'

Nyssa said later, upon hearing what the Doctor recalled of his

experiences. 'That's why the creature - the distortion or whatever -

could only send me back to where I belonged. But aren't you worried

that she's after you now? That she might try something else?'

'Oh Nyssa!' said the Doctor with a grin. 'A mythical personification

of Death? I thought you didn't have such things on Traken. You're

starting to believe too many of Carnon's lies.'

'Well, I know it doesn't sound very scientific, but there are so many

things I don't know yet.'

'And there are some things,' said the Doctor reflectively, 'that we

aren't meant to know. Still, I would be surprised if Carnon's story was

anything more than a corrupted version of the truth. He thrived on

provoking emotional responses, after all.'

'Then why would he have wanted you?'

'To test the dreams of a Time Lord? To provide a psychic battery

for his experiment? Who knows? He was obviously a highly advanced

telepath. He was powerful enough to snatch human minds at the point

of death; to influence the TARDIS, even. I can't pretend to fully

understand the abilities of his kind.'

'But by fighting back,' said Nyssa, 'you made it too much of a strain

for Carnon to hold his imaginary world together?'

'I hope so, yes.'

'What about the others? Patricia? Richard and Jean? Doug?'

The Doctor just shook his head sadly.

Patricia shook her head in disbelief. 'Two weeks? Two weeks?'  
It wasn't

possible. How could a stupid accident have wiped fourteen  
days from

her life?

An urgent thought occurred to her. 'What about the coffee  
account?'

'It's in hand, don't worry. The ads ran three days ago.'

She frowned and stared at Andrew, her personal assistant,  
surprised

that she believed him. He was quite efficient really. She had  
been

planning to fire him, but she could not recall why now.  
Overreacting to

some minor misdemeanour, she supposed. What was the  
point? You

only had one life.

She settled back into her pillow.

'The doctors say you've made a miraculous recovery,' said  
Andrew.

'They say you only survived at all because you fought death  
so hard.'

That sounds like you!'

Patricia smiled, but the smile froze at a fleeting image of Carnon

Manor and the Doctor and her own stark terror. It was dissipating now,

a dream exposed to the daylight. Of course, it could have been no

more. So why did it leave her with a sense of well-being; of pride,

even?

'I fought Death all right,' Patricia Hopkins mumbled happily 'I

fought her and won!'

The Sow in Rut

by Robert Perry and Mike Tucker

Sarah stood up and stretched, rubbing the back of her neck wearily. She

reached down and unplugged her keyboard from the socket on K9's

back panel. With a whirr he made a quick circuit of the coffee table.

Sarah got the impression he was stretching his. .legs?

She crossed to the little window set deep in the thick stone wall, and

stared out across the lake, taking a deep breath. This holiday had

definitely been a good idea. She had spent too long writing for other

people. Ever since she had placed that ad in Time Out and met some of

the Doctor's other companions she had been itching to get on with her

new novel. The cottage was perfect - ancient, remote and spooky.

Cornflower Cottage - a delightfully inappropriate name. Apparently it

had been an inn once, ages ago. Back then it had been more suitably

called the Sow in Rut. Sarah smiled grimly; no wonder it had closed

down. The tall beam which had once held the pub sign still stood

outside the door. It put Sarah in mind of a disused gallows.

The inside of the cottage was ancient and gloomy. Low wooden

beams crossed the ceiling and the shelves on the walls housed an

eclectic mixture of trinkets, pictures and old books. One wall of the

living room was dominated by a huge fireplace - a basket of cut logs

had been waiting for her when she arrived. She got the fire going every

night, regardless of whether she needed the heat or not. It was all about

atmosphere.

She peered at the heavy mantelpiece. There were letters carved into

the dark wood, two inscriptions vying for space. They had intrigued

Sarah for days. She brushed at the carvings, running her fingers over

the letters. *And al the devils besought him, saying, Send us to the swine, that we*

*might enter into them.*

The inscription was carved in a delicate script, but had been partly

obscured by the other quote. Here the letters were harsher, less refined,

gouged into the timber. *My name is Legion: for we are many.*

Wonderful.

She turned back to the window. The Lake District - away from



London, away from Morton Harwood. Away from Brendon - at least

for a day or two. He had understood, of course, when she told him she

needed peace and quiet to write, but the lure of a remote Lake District

cottage at this bleak time of year was just too much - he said he'd join

her in a couple of days.

She smiled. For all his irritating habits Brendon had been invaluable

in getting her up to speed on some of K9's operating procedures. He

had installed her word processor and transferred most of her CD

collection into the little robot's memory.

Rachmaninov's 'Isle of the Dead' was currently drifting through the

dark stone cottage. Sarah found that sombre classical music helped her

mood when writing, but now that she had stopped she found it a little

too depressing. 'Oi, K9!'

'Mistress?'

K9 stopped, spinning around to face her.

'Change the soundtrack. Something a little more lively.'

'Affirmative.'

Sombre violins changed to the thumping drums of the Spice Girls.

Sarah winced. Not quite what she had had in mind. She turned back to

the lake. Obscured by grey clouds, the sun was sinking behind the hills.

She frowned.

'Hey, what time is it?'

'Nineteen thirty-seven and twenty-two seconds, Mistress.'

'Damn! I wanted to get to the shop. Why didn't you tell me it was so

late?'

'You left no such instruction, Mistress.'

K9's tail drooped. It never ceased to amaze Sarah that a tin box

could arouse so much sympathy.

'No, it's my fault. I got too caught up in things.' She crossed to the

small kitchenette and hauled open the fridge. 'We're not exactly

brimming over with food either.'

K9 trundled across to her, his ears whirling furiously.

'Sensors

indicate that cultures currently forming in bovine lactic fluid are liable

to be harmful to humanoid life forms, Mistress.'

Sarah glared at him. 'If you mean the milk's off, just say so.'

She straightened, closing the fridge. 'Right, that settles it. I'm going

down the pub for dinner tonight. You're on guard duty, K9.'

She breezed into the small bedroom and pulled her tweed jacket out

of the wardrobe. Her nose wrinkled. There was an overwhelming smell

of damp. The cottage was on the edge of Grasmere and it had been

raining for days, but even so. .

The robot dog glided into the bedroom.

'Be a good boy and see if you can find out where this damp is

getting in. I'm beginning to smell like a swamp! Oh, and spell check the

last few chapters for me will you - in English, this time! You may have a

multi-species dictionary but I doubt many other people have! See you

later.'

Patting him on the head, Sarah shrugged her jacket on and pulled

open the door.

The pub was in the village - only a five-minute walk, but the roads were

narrow and the pavement was practically non-existent. Not that there

was much traffic. It was September, and the Lakes were hardly overrun

with tourists. Sarah took a deep breath. There was nowhere else in

Britain that smelt as fresh as this. Then she grimaced as she got a waft

of brackish air drifting up from her jacket. She was sure that the cottage

hadn't been that damp when she had moved in two days ago.

A gust of wind made her shiver and she pulled her jacket tighter

around her. Fat spots of rain were beginning to fall. She ducked under a

tree, struggling to pull her old woolly hat from her pocket.

'Cold tonight, innit?'

Sarah stifled a scream. What looked like a bundle of leaves struggled

to its feet, coughing. Sarah could see a middle-aged woman under the

grimy rags.

'You nearly scared the life out of me!'

'I'm sorry, m'dear. I just wanted to give you something.'

The woman fumbled inside her coat and thrust forward a bundle of

heather. Sarah smiled and shook her head. 'I'm sorry, I haven't got any

change.'

The woman looked affronted. 'I don't want money! Nah, you'll pay

if you *don't* take it!'

Sarah looked at her, puzzled. 'I'm sorry?'

'Pay with your soul!' She stepped forward. 'Keep you safe, it will.'

Lucky heather.'

She reached for the collar of Sarah's jacket. Sarah stepped back,

laughing.

'Honestly,' she said, 'you'll have to try someone less gullible. I don't

believe in all that black magic stuff. I had a friend who used to say that

magic was only the bits which science had yet to explain.'

'That's as maybe,' said the old woman, 'but it can still harm you.

You southern city types. .you don't know what goes on.' She spat into

the gutter. 'Well, I've said my piece. My conscience is clear.' Gathering

her rags about her, she shambled off into the rain.

Sarah watched her vanish into the dark, then pulled her hat down

over her ears and resumed her trek towards the pub.

Back in the cottage, K9 was scanning along the edges of the walls for

damp, whirring contentedly. He rounded the door to the kitchen and

stopped. Peat-stained, malodorous water was beginning to creep under

the white wooden door. K9 trundled forward, probe extended. The

water reared up and slithered to one side, like a living thing. K9's

sensors fluctuated wildly, and he began to back away from the writhing

water. Something flickered through his positronic brain. If K9 Mark III

had been built with fear circuits, he might have recognised it.

The Red Lion Hotel was warm and full of hikers. Sarah shouldered her

way over to the bar. The barman saw her eyes running over the wine

list. 'Now then, miss. What would you be wanting with Australian wines

when you could be drinking one of the finest ales in the Lakes.' He

tapped a pump handle. 'Sullivan's Original. You won't find a better pint

in the district.'

Sarah smiled. 'All right. I'll have a pint, but make it a shandy.'

Leaving the scandalised barman to cope with the lively head that the

lemonade was creating, Sarah craned her neck to see round the pub. It

was large and old-fashioned; a real fire burned in one corner, groups of

climbers steaming quietly in front of it.

'There you are, miss.'

The barman placed the pint in front of her and Sarah took a long

gulp. The meeting on the path had rattled her, despite herself. 'Thanks.

I needed that.'

'Will there be anything else?'

Sarah put on her best little-girl-lost look. 'I don't suppose you're still

doing food?'

A couple of hours later Sarah was content, well fed and ever so slightly

tipsy. The pub had managed to rustle her up a chicken and ham pie,

and best of all she'd got chatting to one or two of the locals. Beer, pie

and ghost stories - the perfect evening, even if it had got off to a shaky

start. The raggedy old woman - the heather-seller - had shuffled into

the bar to murmurs of disapproval. The landlord had moved to



intercept her. 'Now, Aggie,' he had said in a voice friendly but firm, 'you

know you're not allowed in here. Off you go.'

'Ye're a hard man, Jack Tatum,' she had whined, 'sendin' me out on

a night like this.'

'Aggie. .' The landlord's face had grown stern.

'Ah, I'll not be stayin' long in your precious pub,' she had snarled.

'It's her I've business with.' She had swung around, her long arm

extended, one bony figure sweeping the pub and coming to rest on

Sarah. 'Her soul's in danger,' the old woman had cried. 'She's stayin' in

Cornflower Cottage.'

The landlord had begun to laugh. 'Cornflower Cottage again, is it?

That old chestnut.' He had turned to Sarah. 'I should buy some of her

wretched heather, if I were you. Then she'll be happy.'

'I don't want her money!' Aggie had snapped. 'There's some of us

thinks of things other than our wallets, Jack Tatum.' She had held out

her ancient, clawed hand. 'Take the heather, miss,' she had pleaded. 'I

don't want no money for it. Take it. Wear it all the time ye're in that

place.'

A tingle of superstitious fear had unexpectedly run down Sarah's

spine. Convincing herself she just felt sorry for the old woman, she had

allowed her to weave a sprig of heather into her button-hole. She had

fumbled inside her pocket and handed the old dear a couple of pounds.

'Much obliged to you, dearie,' the old woman had said, and begun to

shuffle towards the door. 'Ye're kind. Remember what I said.'

'Aggie. .' The landlord's voice had acquired a warning edge.

'All right, I'm goin', aren't I?' the old woman had grumbled, and

pushed her way through the door and out into the night.

'I'm sorry about that,' the landlord had said to Sarah when the door

had swung shut. 'She drinks. .Thinks she's a witch. Got some fixation

with Cornflower Cottage too. She's bothered customers before. .frightened one or two. .'

'Well, I'm not frightened,' Sarah had replied, sipping at her pint.

'Cheers.'

She had drunk in silence for a while, listening to the formless ebb

and flow of pub chatter. She had eaten her food and had another pint.

A quiet voice had tickled at her ear. 'She's right you know. .'

An old man who she had noticed sitting alone in the corner was now

sitting next to her.

'I beg your -'

'Old Aggie. She was right. About Cornflower Cottage.' He had

practically spat the name. 'Bad name. Bad place.'

Sarah had had to suppress a grin - this was pure Hammer Horror.

'Why?' she had asked, all innocence.

'Ah,' the old man had replied, and had said nothing more for a good

five minutes.

Finally he had begun his tale. 'The cottage used to be a coachin' inn,'

he had said.

'I know,' Sarah had interrupted. 'The Sow in Rut.'

The old man's scowl had silenced her. 'The landlord there, 'e allus

used to keep a herd o' pigs. It were a tradition. Now, you knows what

the Bible says about pigs. Unclean beasts. The good Lord 'isself cast the

demon out o' the madman an' into a herd o' swine. You look into the

eyes of a pig - there's summat there. Summat that's almost 'uman.' He

leaned close to her. She could smell flat beer and rolling tobacco on his

breath. 'They says pig-meat's the closest thing to man-meat you'll ever

taste. Now, ol' 'Enery Cunniforth, what was the last landlord o' that

pub - eighty year ago, this'd be - 'e started up the ol' tradition again.

Kept pigs, 'e did, like in the old days. Used to serve up the best cuts o'

pork in these parts. Cutlets, bacon - 'is wife used to cure 'er own ham

and make 'er own sausages, an' the inn came to be a bit of an attraction,

on account o' their table.'

The old man had taken a long, slow pull on his pint before continuing. The pub had fallen silent, everyone listening closely.

'Then, one day, a stranger come to the inn. Started pokin' round.

Said 'is brother'd gone missin'. 'las' place 'e wrote from was the inn. 'E

started pokin' round.. an' what 'e four' -' the old man shuddered - 'it'd

'ave chilled the blood of Lucifer 'isself. Them pigs wasn't bein' killed to

eat. .the people was. Travellers, on their own - 'Enery Cunniforth an' 'is

missis, they was cuttin' 'em up an' cookin' 'em.. servin' 'em up at table.

Tastes jus' like pig-meat, see. An' the rest o' the carcasses they was

feedin' to the pigs thesselves.'

The pub erupted in laughter. Only Sarah, contemplating the night

ahead, was silent.

The old man spoke to her alone now, his voice a rasping whisper.

'An' you know what they said in court when it come to trial, 'Enery an'

Martha Cunniforth? They said it was the pigs as told 'em to do it.'

The pub didn't close until well after midnight. It was blowing a gale

when the landlord had finally called time, and the rain was heavier than

ever. Sarah stumbled back to the bleak old cottage, past the gallows

post that had once held the pub sign, to the low front door. Sullivan's

ale was obviously not as innocuous as it looked. She fumbled with her

key, trying to get it into the lock.

A great gash of forked lightning ripped across the sky, sending

shadows dancing. Sarah started: a great sheaf of heather was tied to the

door knocker and hung there, swaying in the wind. She laughed to

herself. Aggie and the old man had got to her a bit. She took the

heather down from the door - it would help mask the slight smell of

damp inside - plunged her key into the lock and pushed.

The door swung inwards and Sarah stepped into the gloom of the

cottage. Something squelched underfoot. Sarah looked down, puzzled.

The floor was sopping wet. She flicked at the light switch but there was

a crack and a shower of sparks. Sarah snatched her hand back, suddenly

sober.

'K9? Where are you?'

There was a mechanical whirr from the darkness. She strained to

see. The red glow from the robot's eyes was visible on the far side of

the room.

'K9, what's going on?'

She took another step forward, feeling water lapping around her

ankles. The floor was awash and there was a harsh smell of rotting.

'At last. .'

K9's mechanical voice was low and grating. Not the familiar chirp

Sarah was used to.

She stopped. 'K9?'

'At last we are complete. Water, Energy, Flesh. Soon the three will

be one.'

Sarah could see blue sparks crackling around K9's casing. She began

to back away, reaching for the door. Her hand had just closed on the

handle when the door was wrenched from her grip, slamming shut.

Outside in the rain she could hear things shuffling, snuffling. She could

hear harsh hide and sharp bristles scraping on the doorframe, squeaking

on the glass of the windows. Gruff animal snorting echoed through the



walls. Lightning flashed again, and thunder boomed.

K9 began to move forward, a shallow wake glistening in the moonlight.

Sarah edged around the walls of the room, trying to shut out the

noise of the things slithering around outside.

'What are you? What have you done to K9?'

'Trapped is what we are! Trapped and isolated in this vile filth!

Trapped in the bodies that you rear for slaughter! Life after life spent

breeding and eating and dying!'

The mechanical voice was horrible now, a swinish snorting underlying every syllable. The smell was getting stronger. Sarah had to

cover her nose to stop gagging. The voice became calmer.

'We have waited, trapped in the ooze, for summer and winter, again

and again, waiting. Deliverance now! Now! Now!'

'Well, what do you want me for?' Sarah could hear her voice cracking.

The snuffling became a vile machine cackle, burbling with

malevolence. 'You have used our bodies for so long, now we will use

yours.'

The noise from outside became a crescendo. The walls of the little

cottage shook and the doors bulged. Sarah screamed. She could see K9

advancing on her, his probe extended, the energy crackling through his

casing.

She hauled one of the armchairs into his path and clambered over it

to the other side of the room. K9 spun and Sarah could hear the whine

of the laser in his nose powering up.

'Awake or asleep we can still use you.'

There was a sudden burst of ruby light. Sarah threw herself to one

side and something shattered in the dark. Broken glass showered down

on her.

Sarah looked up at the broken mirror. All around her, shards of

silvered glass threw crazy reflections across the room. She rummaged in

her pocket for her keys. Her car was just outside, she'd need only a few

seconds. They slipped from her fingers on to the slimy carpet. She

scrabbled for them desperately. God, she wished she hadn't had those

beers.

She could hear K9 approaching, the light from his eyes casting a

dull red glow, the animal rasping of the creature that had possessed him

getting closer. She struggled out of her jacket, crouching behind the

sofa. As K9 appeared she lunged forward, draping the jacket over his

head. He gave a squeal of protest. The jacket was now smouldering as

the beam from his gun began to burn through it. Sarah bounded for the

window, struggling with the clasp. She hauled herself up on to the

window-sill.

There was another flash of lightning. Sarah screamed and fell back

from the sill, hitting the sopping floor hard. Distorted by the rain, a

bony face was leering in at her through the rain-soaked window. It was

the old witch, Aggie, she was sure; old skin stretched tight over bone,

wild fronds of grey hair floating in the gale. She could hear the old

woman screeching and cackling above the wind.

There was a horrible mechanical shriek from the room. She spun.

Her jacket, now in two smouldering halves, dropped from the metal

dog to the floor. With a snort of triumph K9 raised his head, the red of

his eyes blazing.

'Now!'

Sarah closed her eyes, but the blast never came. There was an

anguished mechanical squawk from below her. She stared back into the

room, puzzled. The bundle of heather she had removed from the front

door lay on the floor, half covered by K9's casing. Strange, she thought

- she had left the heather on a chair on the other side of the room.

Now the little robot seemed fixed to the spot by it, and there were

weird whirrings coming from inside his casing.

She turned back to the window. The old woman - if she had been

there - was gone. K9 remained motionless. She looked frantically

around the room.. the old fire iron next to the grate! She picked it up

and swung it at the window. The ancient glass broke. She punched the

last shards of glass from the window and began to haul herself through.

The window was small, too small. She struggled wildly. Her foot caught

the lamp standing nearby and it crashed to the floor. The bulb broke

and bare terminals sparked on the wet carpet. There was a crackle of

electricity and an anguished squawk from K9, then there was a sudden

silence, broken only by the quiet hissing of rain through the trees.

Sarah stepped back into the room. K9 was motionless in the dark.

She crouched before him. The heather was caught up in his traction

system; tentatively, she began to haul it free.

There was a creak as K9's head slowly rose, the light from his eyescreen soft and low.

'Mistress. .?' The voice was weak and faltering. Sarah patted his nose

gingerly.

'It's all right, K9. I think it's all over.'

The little Metro sped away from the cottage in a shower of fine spray.

K9 was wedged in the back seat, silent and motionless. Sarah drove

through the blinding rain for an hour, putting more and more distance

between herself and Cornflower Cottage. Only when she was out on

the motorway did she allow herself to relax. She realised she had to be

well over the limit, and kept a careful eye on the speedometer.

Finally a Little Chef loomed from the dark, bright and garish and

inviting. Sarah pulled into the car park and, pulling a blanket over K9,

splashed her way over to the restaurant.

She sat for a long while with her coffee, just glad to be somewhere

bright and full of people. She clutched the heather from her lapel,

mulling over and over the events of the evening.

Finally she crossed to the pay phone and dialled Morton Harwood.

After a few moments a sleepy voice answered.

'Hello?'

Relief flooded through Sarah. 'Hi, Brendon, it's me.'

'Sarah? It's. .it's a bit late, isn't it? No. .it's very late. Sarah, it's three

in the morning!' His tone suddenly became concerned.

'Are you OK? Is everything OK with the holiday?'

'Holiday's over, Brendon, I'm on my way back.'

She began to explain about what happened. The old woman, the

ghost stories, the Sow in Rut. 'There was something awful there,

Brendon,' she said. 'I don't know. .it used K9. It seemed to take him

over. .it used him to attack me. It seemed to want to -'

She stopped in mid-sentence. Brendon was laughing at the other end

of the phone. A deep, booming, honking laugh.

'It's no joke, Brendon!' Sarah snapped. 'He could have killed me.'

'I'm sorry. .But I think I know what's going on. I've been using K9

to run some games.' Brendon began honking again.

'Games? Brendon, will you please tell me what the hell you're talking

about.'

'Hang on a minute.'

Sarah heard the phone being put down and muffled scrabblings

from Brendon.

The phone began to bleep at her and she struggled to press more



coins into the slot.

'Brendon? Are you there? Look, I'm running out of cash.'

'I'm here.' He was on the line again. 'Just listen for a minute.  
"In the

vile swamps of Olchfa, the robots of the third battalion must  
battle

against the brutish animal instincts of the Boralth, hideous  
hog-like

creatures of the night. ."

Sarah interrupted him. 'Brendon. .'

'It's a computer game! I got it off one of the guys. I've been  
running

it through K9's processor. He's faster than my game console.

Something must have corrupted his memory. A virus, I  
suppose.

Urn. .Sorry?

Sarah's mind was in a whirl. A game? One part of her wanted  
to

scream at Brendon, another just felt relief. Was that all it  
was? Too

much beer and an overactive imagination? She suddenly  
felt both

incredibly stupid and ridiculously tired.

'Sarah? Sarah, are you still there?'

There was a series of beeps from the phone. 'I'm out of cash, Brendon. I'm going to see if I can get some sleep. I'll see you tomorrow.'

She hung up and crossed the car park back to her car. She pulled the

blanket off K9 and stared at him for a moment. A game. A misunderstanding. A technical error.

She looked at the sprig of heather, then, stifling a yawn, tossed it to

one side and settled down in the car, pulling the blanket over her. In

the pool of rainwater under the car, the heather suddenly shrivelled,

blackening like old leaves. There was a quick flurry of wind and it was

gone.

Dawn came up over the Lakes brilliant and fresh, the night's rain drying

slowly under the rising sun. Cornflower Cottage was empty and damp,

the only noise that of the local builder chipping broken glass from the

window-frame. Strange girl, he thought, cutting her stay short like that,

all because of a burst pipe. He slurped his coffee noisily and took a bite

from his bacon sandwich.

In the mud around the edge of the lake something bubbled angrily,

its swinish instinct raging against humanity. Its chance at resurrection

was gone, but it had infinite lives, infinite patience. It had probed the

memory of the machine and it knew that its wait was not for ever. It

would bide its time. One day, it would be free.

Special Weapons

by Paul Leonard

I

'This is bad,' said the Doctor.

It was dark outside. Mel stared at the viewscreen, the blackness

there, and then at the Doctor's face again. His eyes watched the

viewscreen with a smouldering anger, the kind that looked as if it could

ignite at any moment. For a second, Mel was actually afraid of him.

But there was nothing visible. The scanner might as well have been

broken.

'They shouldn't have done this,' the Doctor concluded. 'We have to

stop it.'

'Stop what?'

But the Doctor thumbed the door control, opening the roundelled

doors on to a draught of icy air.

Mel wrinkled her nose at the stink of it. 'What's that, Doctor?'

'Burned rubber.' The Doctor was already standing in the doorway,

twirling his umbrella, and yes, he was sniffing the air.

'Burned rubber

and death. Come on, Mel, there's work to do.'

Mel looked down at herself: cornflower-blue dress with yellow polka

dots, white socks, black buckle-on shoes. 'Do I need to change?' she

asked.

Outside, it was no less dark. Mel's eyes didn't adjust. There was nothing

for them to adjust to. The Doctor had a torch: it was like an usherette's,

a red glow in his hand, a vague pool of light at the end of the beam.

She saw splashes of tarmac, ashen grass.

A sound. Chrr-rr-rr. Mechanical, repetitive. Starter motor? Yes there

was the soft roar of an engine starting up. And light - two dim pools of

yellow, with the faint shine of metal between them. A car, old-

fashioned with huge headlamps, ghosting its way up the road, engine

rumbling.

Yes. A road - a street. Buildings on either side, grey brick. Mel saw a

market cross in the transient light, very English, and the words PAX

LUCIS.

The car was passing them, the interior dark except for a coal-red

point that Mel realised was a cigarette, and a glint from - eyes? Glasses?

Then it was gone, leaving a smell of unburned petrol.

'Now, Mel -' whispered the Doctor.

Then the searchlights came on, closely followed by gunfire.

Oliver didn't want to think about the blood. He could still feel it on his

hands and face, sticky, congealing.

Stay with me, she'd said, and he'd stayed, listening to her hideous

breathing, his own body burning with shock, his hand on hers. He had

felt her death as it stole her.

Had she realised she was dying? Probably.

Ellen had been nineteen, two years older than Oliver. He'd liked her

face, broad and pretty, framed by hair the colour of copper beech

leaves. Her eyes dark, brownish-green like woodland shadows, her cheeks

roseate, the colour reminding him of the pale sheen of sea shells. She'd

let him kiss her, out there in the dry stubble in the shadow of the green

branches, even though he was shorter than her and younger. She'd

tasted of tobacco, but he'd still wanted to kiss her again,  
and go on

kissing, like in the song on the radio, me for you and you for  
me. .

They'd been kissing when the planes went over.

Oliver had known the shapes, yelled, 'They're German!'  
They'd

pounded down across the field to the stile that overlooked  
the village,

watching the planes in the air, high, tiny crosses, their  
movements

strangely slow. They cast precise shadows, like spiders  
crawling over the

small, sunlit buildings. Still Oliver and Ellen had thought  
themselves

safe, still they'd been holding hands - because no one ever  
bombed Pax

Lucis. There was nothing to bomb.

They'd seen the parachutes, dawning white flowers under  
the bellies

of the planes, the beetle shapes of armoured cars suspended  
from

them, and tiny men, dolls with machine guns. Ellen had  
gasped,

pointed a broad arm at the village where Oliver saw a huge shadow,

spreading far too fast, a tar-black fluid. They looked at each other,

afraid and confused.

'What -' began Ellen.

Then the sunlight had died, as if someone had switched it off. The

ground heaved like a rowing boat in a storm, and Ellen's body was

falling away from Oliver's. He heard her scream over the cracking of

the earth.

'A bomb?' He'd said it aloud into the ringing silence: 'Was that a

bomb?'

He couldn't hear the planes any more, couldn't see anything. Was he

blind?

But there had been no answers, there had only been the silence, and

the warm sticky blood on his face and hands.

'Ellen?'



'Stay with me.' Her voice wounded, trembling, each word forced,

choked. And then there had only been her breathing, her hideous

breathing, and the darkness.

After the breathing stopped, Oliver ran. But he was blind, he was

still blind and the Germans had landed, and he didn't know where he

was going, or whether there was anywhere to go.

Bullets shredded the air, leaving trails of sound, pressure waves. Mel

flinched at each crack, each shiver in the air. Somewhere, glass

shattered. Were people dying?

The Doctor was crawling along the pavement, waving his umbrella

like a flag of truce, shouting something. No one was taking any notice.

Mel pressed herself flat against the wall of a post office, cold stone

against her back.

Cold. It was terribly cold. She was shivering. A man was screaming

horribly. And - there, with the guns, the black uniforms moving out of

the shadows - were those Nazis?

'Doctor!' she shouted. 'Doctor!'

But he didn't hear her. And he didn't fight when the two black-

uniformed men grabbed him and dragged him away. Mel wanted to run

after him, but her body just hid of its own accord, slipping into a

doorway, fear moving her limbs as if she were a puppet.

Dark soldiers ran up the road, their boots crunching on the gravel,

their faces shadowed. They didn't look at her.

A final burst of gunfire, and a ringing of metal - had they hit the

car? Then silence. The lights died, leaving a dim, low illumination that

cast long, weak shadows. After a while, the soldiers returned, carrying

something. Dark fluid dripped on to the road from the burden.

When they were gone Mel ran back, back towards the TARDIS,

back out of here.

But there was a soldier standing guard outside the TARDIS,  
his eyes

shadowy. He shouted, and Mel just ran, and ran, and ran, the  
hard

asphalt jarring her ankles, the cold air tearing at her lungs.

II

Killing had the quality of a dream for Luther. Dead people  
were like

straw dummies, empty of the load they had carried in life.  
He envied

their waxen faces, their hardened eyes. He dreamed of the  
dead - every

night he dreamed of them. They drifted through dark clouds,  
wreathed

with solemn music. They smiled at him.

So easy to be dead. So difficult to be alive. The living had  
responsibilities.

'This is the last chance, Franz,' he said to the tall, pale-faced  
man

standing beside him. 'It will all be over after this.'

Franz nodded, his eyes moving nervously as if he were  
looking for

enemies hiding in the walls. The English room was strange around

them: the puffed chairs and sofas pushed back against the wall were

dark, like corpses swollen by water. A stout, wooden table was like an

oversized coffin. The windows were tall, church-like, the warped glass

reflecting the bright field lamps in amoebic shapes that resembled

screaming faces. Behind them, outside, trucks hunkered in the near-

blackness.

The Englishman's corpse was lashed to the hatstand, the skin of his

face taut, distorted, the holes in his body dark. Luther smiled at him,

snatches of *Gotterdammerung* moving through his mind.

It had been a meeting room for the English villagers: posters on the

wall proclaimed the virtues of Land Girls, and advised that 'Careless

Talk Costs Lives'. They were different from German posters, softer,

more homely, the gentle pastel colours flowing into one another as if

they had been painted by children anxious to please Mamma. German

designs were by contrast sharp-edged, declarative and frightening:

statements of the supremacy of the Aryan race. How could these pastel

poseurs - these Mamma's boys - be winning the war?

Luther answered his own question aloud. 'It's the Russians, Franz.

This lot couldn't win a fencing match against Germans. But the

Russians - they're crazy.'

Like us. But he didn't say that. Even to think it was almost treason.

Franz just nodded again. He was tall, blond, blue-eyed: a good child of

Germany. And he was a child. He believed it. Superior men, true men,

cleaning the world of all falsity and darkness. Ruling it according to the

principles of justice and light. Luther had chosen Franz for that, for the

dream, for the belief, for the cleanness in his heart. It was refreshing.

There was a knock at the door. Franz moved his hands to the holster at his waist.

'Enter,' snapped Luther.

The door opened on Lieutenant Herz. Intelligent, thin-faced, reliable, a good killer.

'The man we captured, sir. We found - devices. He is not an ordinary man. He says he's a doctor, but -' He reached forward, showed

a metal device too small for a gun. 'A "sonic screwdriver". He says it's

harmless. But he has other things - some are toys, he calls one a "yo-

yo". He's strange.'

Luther knew what the question was: it didn't need to be asked.

Should he be killed?

'Bring him here,' he ordered. 'I'll talk to him.'

He could sense Franz's quickened breathing.

When Herz had left, he whispered, 'Maybe, Franz. Maybe. But I

need to talk to him first.'

He went to the posters and read the small print. He wanted to know

everything he could about the country he was about to destroy.

The collision knocked the breath out of Oliver's body, and he fell, the

stone of the road scraping his cheek. The woman screamed, one short,

sharp call. There was a moment's silence, both of them breathing hard.

Then she asked: 'Doctor?'

'No,' said Oliver. 'I was looking for a doctor too.' His voice sounded

rough, broken. Almost like Ellen's. He hadn't known he was looking

for a doctor. He'd just been running. But it seemed as good an idea as

any.

'A doctor?'

'I can't see,' he explained. 'I'm blind.'

'No, you're not.' The woman's voice was brisk, practical, all trace of

fear and confusion gone. He heard her getting up, stamping shoes on

the road. 'There just isn't any light, that's all.'

'There was a bomb -'

'A bomb?'

Oliver realised he didn't recognise the woman's voice. There was a

hint of a posh accent, a distinctive high pitch. 'Who are you?'

'Melanie Bush.'

Oliver introduced himself in return. It felt strange, in the darkness,

with blood on his hands, exchanging introductions as if they were at a

tea party. She must be another Land Girl, he decided.

'Ellen's dead.' He blurted out the story, his tongue falling over the

words: the planes, the shadows, the bomb, her death. When he'd

finished, there was a silence. Belatedly, he thought to add, 'I'm sorry,

was she a friend of yours?'

But Mel ignored this. 'Are you sure you haven't been unconscious?'



she asked.

Oliver hesitated. 'I'm - almost sure. Not for long. I mean, if I was, it

wasn't for long.'

'So it was the middle of the afternoon - bright sunlight - and now it's

midnight. Hmm Time travel? No wonder the Doctor said it was bad.

What year is this?'

'What?'

'Sorry. Something peculiar's happened here and the Doctor - I

mean, we're both here to help.'

Oliver felt his body begin to tremble. 'No,' he said, though he wasn't

quite sure what he was saying no to. 'You're Germans, you must be

Germans. You're a spy.'

A loud sigh. 'Why does everyone think that?'

The wind rustled trees nearby. Oliver saw a glimmer of light, the

faint line of a horizon. So Melanie was right: he wasn't blind.

'Look, we're British,' the woman said. 'At least I am and the

Doctor's - well, he's not German, anyway.'

Oliver realised then. The woman wasn't a spy: she was mad. She

didn't know what year it was, she had an invisible companion with no

nationality. It was obvious that the bomb, and the sudden darkness or

blindness or whatever it was, had all been too much. She thought she

could help, but she couldn't. He had to think of something, to plan

something.

'Listen,' he said quietly. 'We've got to get to the village. My dad's in

the Home Guard. Him and Mr Faraday will be organising them to resist

- you know, clear up. They'll telephone - there's a procedure-'  
He

stopped. 'What have you seen?'

'German soldiers. Someone in a car was killed. And they took the

Doctor away.'

'Dr Allen?'

'No. The Doctor. He's my friend. Weren't you listening?' A

moment's silence. Oliver heard a single chirrup from a bird.  
It sounded

lost, afraid. 'The Germans have got the Doctor,' Mel went on.  
'Unless

he's escaped. He usually escapes.'

'We have to get to the village,' said Oliver again. 'I know the  
road,

even in the dark.'

But he didn't. At night, maybe, but not in this darkness. And  
Mel

said they had shot someone in a car. And Ellen was dead,  
her blood

caked on his skin.

He felt cold. 'What happens if we run into the Germans?' he  
asked

Mel.

'I don't know.'

'Who is this man?'

The prisoner sounded angry. His face was torn into an ape-  
like

scowl. He paced the room, twirling his strange umbrella, his  
two-

coloured shoes clicking on the bare boards. The corpse on  
the hatstand

smiled.

'Why have you killed him? You can see he's a civilian -'

'Was a civilian, Herr Doktor,' interrupted Luther gently. 'His status

is no longer important. Think of him as a scarecrow, a straw man. His

function now is to instil fear.'

'In me?' The Doctor raised his umbrella. Franz moved beside Luther; Luther held up a hand. 'You're trying to frighten me?' He took

a step closer. 'You're mad.'

'Very probably,' said Luther. 'But I have the gun.'

The Doctor didn't reply, just turned away in theatrical disgust.

'I need some information before I kill you,' observed Luther.

'Well, you're not going to get it, so you might as well kill me now.'

The Doctor was examining a small canvas bag, rummaging inside

like a child looking for the best sweet. Franz was watching, his body

tense.

Metal clattered, then the Doctor gave a satisfied 'Ah!' and raised a

hand. A light flickered on his palm, brilliant, like a tiny piece of magic

caught for an instant inside mundane reality.

'He put something in his pocket,' said Franz.

The Doctor glanced up, nodded. 'You have splendid powers of

observation. It's such a shame that you've chosen to use them in the

cause of evil.' He strode up to Luther again. Franz pulled his gun, but

again Luther waved him back. 'It's part of a living thing,' hissed the

Doctor. 'A lightwanderer, in its crystalline phase. I suppose it must have

crashed here, and you have found it.' His scowl broke open again.

'You!'

Luther had heard enough. He didn't know where the weapon had

come from. He hadn't needed to know. This man was either insane or

he knew too much. Either way, there was a solution.

He turned to Franz. The young man was standing relaxed, the

buttons on his uniform gleaming against the black. 'Prepare him for

questioning. Ten minutes.'

Franz's eyes widened with anticipation. Luther smiled. He counted

Franz as a friend, and Luther liked to give his friends the things they

needed.

III

Mel wasn't going to let Oliver die. Not after Pex - it would be too

horrible. She could hear the young man's shoes behind her on the road,

hear his breath - rapid, still in shock after that girl's death. She was the

responsible one, she told herself. She had to get them both out of this

alive.

And rescue the Doctor. Yes. That too.

The road was still dark, but a faint electric brightness glimmered

somewhere ahead. Possibly headlights, though Mel couldn't hear any

engines. She felt very exposed walking like this, her heels clicking on

the asphalt, but crossing fields and hedgerows in total darkness was

likely to be worse, if not impossible. And staying still was no use.

'There!' said Oliver suddenly, in a stage whisper.

Mel saw lights, tall windows. Faint boxy shapes that might be army

trucks. No insignia were visible.

'That's the vicarage,' Oliver told her. 'That's where the Home Guard

will be.'

'Or the Germans,' said Mel.

They stopped, silent for a moment.

'Perhaps we should -' muttered Oliver.

'Take a look,' said Mel, cursing herself. 'We'll have to.' Briskly she

added: 'Stay with me, move as quietly as you can, and don't say a word.'

Grüber was touching the machinery as usual, his long thin fingers

balanced on the fine wires that suspended the Exclusion Generator. He

looked up when Luther came in, his metal-rimmed spectacles glinting

in the light from the device. The same light shone, more faintly, on the

stone pillars of the church, and was captured by the silver cross of the

altar.

'It's ready,' Grüber said. 'More than ready.' He indicated an instrument, a heavy metal needle pointing at the figure 12. It meant

nothing to Luther. 'It's just a matter of checking the field extent,'

Grüber explained. 'An error of just 2 per cent in the voltage - ' he

indicated the instrument again - 'would be an error of 100 per cent in

the field extent. We could destroy Berlin. Moscow, even.' Refracted

light moved under his spectacles, and his thin lips twitched. Perhaps he

thought that he'd made a joke. Luther didn't think it was funny.



'The English know we have a special weapon,' Luther told Grüber.

'Herz captured a scientist. They must have known we were coming.

They may have a counter-weapon. Watch for any abnormal activity.' He

glanced at the crystal, the green-blue light moving and shaping in the

depths. Like wings, he thought, a thousand wings captured in unison.

And the Doctor had said it was alive.

He shook his head. What nonsense. It was a machine. A special

weapon. That was all.

'When will the squad return?' Grüber's obsessive fingers stroked the

support wires. His lips twitched again and he glanced at the altar, his

expression nervous.

'Soon,' said Luther. 'I told them one hour.'

Three men had been sent out into the fractured countryside to make

measurements, to calibrate the effect, so that Grüber could adjust

whatever needed to be adjusted. It should have been done in Germany,

but the Fuhrer had refused to risk so much as a single handful of

German soil. And why should they? The English had made this war;

the English should suffer.

'The ultimate penalty,' Luther muttered.

Grüber glanced up.

'And us,' he said. 'We, too, will not survive this.'

Luther shrugged. 'For the good of the Fatherland,' he said, saluting.

'Heil Hitler!'

Grüber returned the salute, reluctant, his eyes on the machine as if

hypnotised. The light danced on his face, a dim reflection of the

unknown truth inside the machine. 'No one will survive,' he said.

Anywhere.'

'I don't agree,' said Luther.

The church and vicarage were surrounded by a low wall. He knew that

wall, he knew the trees inside it; but in the non-light it was only rough

dry stone under the tips of his fingers, a smell of brick, an oppression

of unseen branches. Mel had been a pale shape ahead of him but now

there were no shapes, only a ghosting of light to his left. A warmth

behind him, a breathing - that was Mel, or might be Mel. Or might be

his imagination. Perhaps she was ahead of him. Could he risk talking?

He took a step along the wall towards the light leaking from what

must be the gateway. He remembered the stone arch, the cool space

underneath it, the worn wooden bench, the brown and gold notice

board that gave the times of the services. Would the gate be guarded?

Oliver stopped, his hand still touching the wall, and tried to listen.

A stick snapped, and something crackled and shuffled in the loose

leaves beyond the wall, under the trees.

A voice, ahead. Low, a man's voice, and strange.

German. It must be a German.

There was a blaze of light, sharp long double shadows  
reaching

towards Oliver like hands. He saw the archway, the notice  
board.

Twenty yards away. further than he'd thought. A man was  
standing

with his back to Oliver, shadowed against the light - but that  
was a

helmet, that was a gun.

A German. A sentry. What was he going to do?

' *Ein Fuchs!* '

Oliver felt Mel touch his arm, sensed the message: keep still.  
But he

didn't want to keep still; he wanted to move, move now  
when the

enemy's back was turned. While he had a chance. He took a  
step

towards the man, heard Mel's faint gasp, saw the man  
turning, saw his

face -

And then the lights went out.

A harsh crack. A gunshot? Mel's voice, 'Run!'

He ran, straight towards the sentry.

'Run away!' Mel was almost screaming. But Oliver couldn't stop.

Ellen was dead, she was dead and this was a German -

Impact. The man's uniformed body was curiously cold, almost as if

the alien cloth were wet. The man gave a grunt, then a shout, so loud

that Oliver recoiled. A thing like a wooden beam thudded into his back

and he was falling, the rough stone a cold shock against his face, the air

gone from his lungs.

I've been shot, he thought.

Breath on the back of his neck. 'Who? Who are you, boy?' Almost

no accent. But German, yes, surely German. 'You are being a hero?

Why? I should kill you. Klaus!'

Light returned, showing grainy stone, the bevelled gap between two

grey flags, fragments of soil.

'Please -' Mel's voice. 'Please, we were just coming to the church.

It's so dark. .we didn't know what was happening. .'

She sounded young, weak, frightened, confused. Not like she had in

the road. An act? It must be. At least she wasn't a German. At least

he'd been right to trust her.

The wooden beam was removed from his back, and Oliver realised

it was the German soldier's arm.

'Stand up.'

He stood, trembling. A glance at his body showed no blood: he

hadn't been shot, then. The man must have knocked him over, that was

all. But his legs felt weak, distant, as if blood was gushing out of him.

A hand turned his face, cold, clay fingers pressing into his flesh.

'Look at me!' The shadows on the young German's face were long.

Eyes met his, shadowy; glinting. 'Go to your home, English boy. We

are in control. There is a curfew. You will know when it is over.'

There was something in his voice that frightened Oliver more than

the words: pity. You will know when it is over. Was the war over, or

nearly over? Had the Germans won? But how? Surely they couldn't

have invaded the whole of England. Their armies were in Russia and in

Italy, mostly, everyone knew that. And they were losing. If he and Mel

could get out of Pax Lucis - get a message out. .

But to where? What had happened to the world? Why was it dark?

He looked into the German's eyes, tried to frame the question in a way

that would bring an answer, or at least a clue.

Before he could speak, a shot sounded from the vicarage. A voice

shouted in pain or anger - Oliver couldn't make out any words. Mel

whispered something, a single, strangled word.

Oliver couldn't move. He could see the vicarage lawn, pale and

shadow-streaked in the light, which he could now see came from the

headlamps of an armoured car.

'We must save the Doctor!' This time Mel's hoarse whisper carried

to Oliver and his captor.

'You can't save anyone,' said the German. The quietness, the terrifying pity, had returned to his voice. 'Go home. Both of you. Now!'

'We'll go home,' said Oliver, half to Mel, half to the German soldier.

'It's just round the corner.' The little row of cottages stretching up from

the crossroads, the flowers bobbing in the garden - or had that been

bombed too? Was there rubble, torn earth, where home had been?

There was another shot from inside the vicarage, and a thud like a

sack being thrown to the floor.

Mel screamed. 'Doctor!'

'Silence!' snapped the soldier. 'Silence or I will kill you!'

Oliver turned towards Mel, ran to her. In the light from the car he



could see his hands, the skin patchy with darkness. Blood.  
Blood on his

hands.

He grabbed Mel's arm. 'We can't do anything. Follow me.'

As they walked away into the false night, Mel made a faint  
snuffling

sound. Oliver realised she was crying.

Was that your friend in the vicarage?' he asked.

She didn't reply.

IV

Oliver's mother was a small woman, her black hair peppered  
with silver

and cut quite short. A white hand rested on Oliver's  
shoulder, as if the

woman was reassuring herself that he was real. The room  
around her

was filled with dark, clumsy furniture: chairs, a sofa, a  
wooden cabinet

with a glass front and a glimmer of silver inside. An oil lamp  
had been

placed on a low table, and it cast huge, distorted shadows.  
They seemed

to move, just a little: monsters, growling on faded wallpaper  
patterned

with leaves, waiting to pounce.

Nonsense, Mel told herself. But the image wouldn't go away.

Oliver's mother kept talking, as if to fill the silence creeping in from

the street. 'Mr Faraday was going for help, dear. But we haven't heard

anything. And there were gunshots. Oh, surely it can't be an invasion.

Not now. It's so nearly over!'

Oliver glanced at Mel, his expression serious and more than a little

afraid. She remembered that she'd told him about the car, and the

gunshots she'd heard. She wondered who Mr Faraday had been, before

he'd been a corpse in the arms of soldiers. The vicar? A farmer? Had he

left a wife? Children? Would they die too?

'What is it, dear?' Oliver's mother was looking at Mel, her eyes

bright with attention.

Mel realised she was crying. 'My friend's dead,' she said. 'He came to

help you and they've killed him. We heard him die.'

'I don't think he's dead,' said Oliver.

Mel stared at him.

'Your friend knows what the Germans are doing, doesn't he?'

'Maybe,' said Mel.

'So they won't kill him. They'll try and find out what he knows. They

probably fired the gun to frighten him.'

Mel nodded. It was possible. It had happened before. And the

Doctor had let himself be captured - hadn't he? He must have known

what he was doing. He usually did - in the end - even if he never

seemed to. And if they were questioning him..

'We have to save him,' she said, without thinking.

'No, my dear.' Oliver's mother. She was looking at the ground, her

face shadowed with anxiety. 'We have to wait. The army will arrive soon

- they're certain to find out what has happened. If we try to do anything

in the meantime. .' She stopped. 'What can have happened to Mr

Faraday?'

Mel made a decision.

'He didn't get out of the village,' she said briskly. 'They killed him.'

Oliver's mother sat down on the arm of a chair, clenched her fists in

her lap. She said nothing.

Mel looked at Oliver. He wasn't just strong: he was competent, and

fairly sensible. Not like Pex at all. And anyway, he was all she had.

There was no time, in the dark, with enemy guns all around, to organise

anything better. 'C'mon,' she said. 'We're going to have to do it.'

Oliver's mother looked up at him, then at Mel. 'Please. We should

wait.'

'No,' said Mel.

Oliver said, 'I know a way we could get out. We can go by the

stream. They won't have guarded that.'

After a long moment, his mother nodded.

Mel thought to herself, If he dies, then what will you say to her?

The Doctor's face was pale, and covered with red welts, but Luther

knew that he was still strong. His eyes were implacable, and his grimace

was one of anger, not pain. There was light in his eyes, too much light.

The lamp, he thought. It's the lamp. It's very bright, almost a point

source. And the Doctor's eyes will be full of tears from the pain, which

will make them more reflective. That's all it is.

He glanced at the corpse, as if for reassurance. It grinned darkly.

'But if I'm dead I won't be able to help you, will I?'

The Doctor's voice was quiet, entirely without panic, but oddly

persuasive. He didn't want to die, that much was clear. And yet. .

Luther often wished he could read minds, and he wished for that gift

now most of all. The Doctor didn't seem to be afraid of death, as

young people were, but he didn't seem ready to welcome it either. Why

not? Surely once you had ceased to fear death, you could only desire it?

It was a riddle. Finding out what the Doctor knew about the Exclusion

Generator was secondary, incidental. As in music, where the melody

should arise from the deeper harmony, so the trivial truth of the

Doctor's mission as an English spy would arise from the depths of his

character.

Luther became aware of Franz, still standing to attention in his

starched and perfect uniform, the buttons gleaming. He felt a pang of

irritation, like an itchy eye. He turned to the young man, snapped,

'Leave this to me. Go and watch Grüber. Report on his progress.'

Franz nodded, saluted, left. No surprise showed on his face. Luther

found himself thinking that perhaps Franz was not, after all, so worthy.

Perhaps he was an automaton, a golem, in his perfect love of cleanness

and truth. He turned to the Doctor, asked softly, 'Why do you cling to

life? You know what happens in the world. You know that nothing can

be made clean, nothing can be made perfect, nothing can even be made

good. I can see it in your eyes. So why live?'

'Because it's better than death,' growled the Doctor.

'Is that the only reason?' asked Luther.

'I can fight people like you.'

Luther felt strangely disappointed, and realised that this was because

he had allowed himself to hope. Why had he felt that this spy could

give his life a meaning? It must be an illusion, a hypnosis.

'Life is better,' the Doctor reaffirmed. 'Give me a day, and I'll prove

it to you.'

Luther looked out of the window at the English village slowly

freezing into the darkness. 'There may not be time for that,' he said.

They had found a flashlight, but it wasn't like the Doctor's. It was big

and unwieldy, a metal box, cold under Mel's fingers. The beam was

bright, too bright.

Oliver led the way, and they kept to darkness, following side paths,

tracks across fields. Finally they came to a narrow road that he said

went to a place called Wyecombe Maltravers, three miles away. Mel

wondered what would be happening there, whether they even knew

about the invasion. If the Germans had warped time. .

This might even be a time before the war, or after it. The air was

cold, cold as a winter's night. The birds, the trees, were silent. Yet

Oliver had said that it was summer - July. That it had been a warm day.

What if they found themselves in the Middle Ages? Or the Bronze

Age? Were the Germans trying to save the Reich by moving it back in

time?



No wonder the Doctor had been so worried.

Ahead of her, Oliver stopped.

'There's something in the road,' he whispered. 'I think it's a bomb

crater.'

Mel manoeuvred the chunky switch on the flashlight. The beam

showed crumpled asphalt under Oliver's feet. Oliver's breath, frosting

the air. Nothing beyond.

Mel tried it again, directing the flashlight beam across the slanting

surface of the road. Broken rock glinted inside the cracks - or was it

ice? Above that, there was no reflection at all. She swung the beam to

left and right: fallen hedges reached like ghosts, leaves shining, then

sheared off into splinters.

'Should we try to get closer?'

Mel shook her head, but Oliver was already taking a step across the

broken ground, reaching out -

'Ow!' His fingers were touching something, a dark invisibility above

the broken road. Mel saw him try to pull away, saw the ends of his

fingers whiten. She felt a surge of cold panic and grabbed hold of him

around the chest, pulling backwards as hard as she could. They both

fell, tumbling on the hard ground.

She stood up slowly, winced at a pain in her elbow. The flashlight

was on its back, shining into the air.

'What is it?' asked Oliver, his voice edgy, afraid.

'I don't know,' said Mel.

His fingers were bleeding - skin had been torn away. Mel picked up

the flashlight. Its beam wavered: perhaps the battery was dying. She saw

a reflection, a white blob cemented to the wall of nothing. She

frowned, looked more closely.

It was a fragment of Oliver's skin, and a few drops of his blood.

The blood was frozen.

'What do you see in this room?' The Doctor was sitting, propped

against one of the English stuffed sofas. The marks on his face seemed

to be fading. Healing. Why?

'What do you see?' he repeated.

'An English room,' said Luther, playing the game, waiting for the

Doctor to reveal himself. 'Furniture. Posters.'

The Doctor's expression was expectant, calm.

'You. Me. A corpse.' Luther looked around for more.

'Windows. A

door.'

'No no no no. What do you see?'

Luther had no reply.

'Vicarage tea parties,' said the Doctor suddenly.

Luther stared at him. He was pointing at the table, on which Herz

had spread a map.

'Look! Here! I see the people who live in this place, sitting at that

table, or on these sofas with plates on their laps. Cups of tea, pieces of

jam sponge cake. People talking about the things that humans talk

about - each other, the things they do, their small friendships and their

petty squabbles. Their children, their futures, all the possibilities. That's

what they'd be doing now if your Fuhrer hadn't insisted on fighting this

war. 'They're happier now, Doctor.' Luther allowed the anger to show in

his voice. This was too easy: the Doctor's arguments were facile, stupid

even. He turned to face the windows and gestured at the silent village.

'They're much happier than they've ever been. They have something to

fight. A cause. An adventure.'

A pause. 'That's possible, in some cases. The struggle for survival is

important to humans.' He seemed suddenly lost in his own thoughts. 'I

sometimes think that's why Mel and the others -'

'Others?' Luther whirled to face the Doctor, wondering if this was

the revelation he'd been waiting for. 'So there are others?  
Where are

they? In the village?'

But the Doctor only smiled, an absurd, amiable, smile that  
made

Luther want to kill him. 'Oh, I don't think any of my friends  
will be in

Pax Lucis,' he said.

There was a knock at the door, and Herz came in, his eyes  
dark. He

glanced at the Doctor.

'Go on,' said Luther.

'The survey team have come back. Grüber is making the  
calculations.' Another glance at the Doctor. 'It will be ready  
in thirty  
minutes.'

Luther nodded. 'I want the prisoner to see this,' he said. 'Get  
Franz.

When the time comes we will carry him down.'

Herz stared.

'I want him to see that he has failed,' said Luther.

Herz still stared. His uniform was dark, coal-black, the  
buttons and

badges like diamonds. His eyes, quick, intelligent, searched the room.

'There's no danger,' said Luther. 'But handcuff him, just in case.'

Herz nodded at last.

'He may reveal something,' said Luther. 'Something that I need to

know.'

'Very well, Herr Oberleutnant.' But Herz still wasn't happy. Luther

wondered whether he had been listening at the door.

Vicarage tea parties. Happiness. No doubt Herz would think these

were treasonable subjects. Luther felt an unfamiliar tension in his face

and throat, and realised that he was suppressing a smile.

He glanced at Herz, saw no flicker of life, only the perfect, aquiline,

killer's face.

'The method of interrogation is my responsibility,' he said. 'It is not

necessary to be direct.'

Herz nodded, once, like an automaton on a chiming clock.

When he had gone, Luther knelt down by the Doctor and whispered, 'We're going to destroy England. All of England. As an example.'

'Using this "device" of yours? Do you know what it does?'

'It makes a barrier. Nothing can pass through. No people, no air, no

sunlight. Everything inside the barrier will die.'

The Doctor stared at him.

V

'There has to be a way through.'

Oliver was determined, Mel could give him that. But he wasn't being

sensible, not this time. She said, 'If the Germans put the barrier there,

they won't have left any holes. If there were holes, we'd see the light

coming through them. There isn't any light.' There was none at all:

she'd switched the torch off, to conserve its wavering power supply.

'We ought to go back to the village. Perhaps the Doctor -'  
She broke

off.

'If he's alive,' said Oliver. There was an edge of cruelty, of certainty,

in his voice that Mel didn't like.

'I thought you said he would be. That they wouldn't kill -'

'I just said that to get you going again,' snapped Oliver. 'I need your

help, because you seem to know more about what's happening here

than I do.'

'I don't know anything,' protested Mel. Her heart was sinking inside

her. Had the Germans killed the Doctor? Surely that wasn't possible.

But that had been his voice. There had been a gunshot.

'You do know,' Oliver was saying. 'You must.' He was close to her

in the darkness. She could hear his breathing, feel a slight radiated heat.

'You said you came here to help. Who sent you? The War Ministry?'

'The Doctor brought me.'

'How did you get here? In an aeroplane? Can it go through the



barrier?'

The questions were fast, bewildering. 'I don't know,' said Mel miserably. 'And even if it could I can't steer it and I don't know where

we'd end up. It could be anywhere. Any when. We might never get

back.'

An intake of breath. 'Very well. We'll have to try and find a way

through, as I said.'

'Or go back and rescue the Doctor.'

'Without weapons we've got about as much chance of rescuing him

as of walking to Wyecombe along this road. How much do you know

about this barrier thing?'

'I told you. Nothing.'

'Weren't you told about it before coming on the mission?'

'The Doctor doesn't work like that. He doesn't have missions, he

doesn't have plans. He just does things.'

An intake of breath. 'I thought that the Ministry would be

organised.'

'Life isn't always like that, Oliver,' said Mel softly. She'd almost

forgotten she was talking to a teenager. Since she'd started travelling

with the Doctor she felt so much older.

'What if we went underground? Do you think the barrier would still

be there?'

'I don't know.' Mel was feeling impatient. They had to help the

Doctor, somehow. This speculation was aimless. 'We can't get

underground,' she said.

'We can. There's a quarry, about a mile from here. Across the field

where Ellen and I were - where Ellen -' He broke off. 'Well, across the

field.'

Silently Mel reached out and found his hand in the darkness. 'I hope

your friend's still alive,' he said after a moment.

'Thank you,' said Mel.

There was no light in the quarry, and no sign of movement.  
Oliver said

it hadn't been used for a couple of months: the workers had  
been

directed elsewhere, to something more urgent. The quarry  
owner had

made a fuss about it, demanding compensation.

The flashlight revealed little: heaps of mud-coloured stone,  
dim

parallels that might be railway tracks. Nearer, there were  
wooden crates

abandoned on the lip of the workings. Tall grass was growing  
through

them. The grass was coated with frost.

Mel remembered that it was supposed to be summer, and  
shivered.

'There's a way down.' said Oliver. His voice echoed: ow-ow-  
ow-n.

'Shh! There might be guards!' whispered Mel.

Oliver dropped his voice to a whisper, but said, 'Don't think  
so.

They'd have shot us by now.'

Mel had the impression that he was smiling. When had he  
started to

think that danger was funny?

As they walked and slithered down the crumbling path, she could

hear only the scrape of shoes on the rough rock, the occasional faint

rattle of a displaced fragment jittering down the slope.

At the bottom it was oddly warm. It gave Mel hope. She thought

she could smell summer through the quarry dust, the summer evening

that it should be, according to Oliver's wristwatch. Perhaps there was

an escape, a relief from the cold weight of the barrier that surrounded

them, crossing the sky, shutting out the sun.

'Here,' said Oliver. 'In here.'

He had the flashlight. The beam picked out more of the sallow rock,

angled chunks of it like small mountains. Then a ragged mouth, a hole

in the quarry wall.

'Railway tunnel.' whispered Oliver. 'It comes out south of Wyecombe, near the Summerworks.'

'I'm going in first,' said Mel. 'You hold the light.'

'No,' said Oliver. 'I should -'

Mel just started walking. The flashlight was wavering again. She

wondered if the batteries would last long enough. Not that it would

matter if the barrier continued underground. She sniffed at the air

again, wondered if the summer she could smell was just the accretion

of scents trapped in the quarry. The tunnel looked entirely dark.

There were some crates stacked up against the entrance, half-

blocking it. Red crosses of paint were splashed on the wood. Mel

picked her way to the left of the crates, walking on the sleepers

between the rust-coloured railway tracks. Her shadow bobbed in front

of her.

The walls of the tunnel were bare rock. Mel couldn't see more than

a hundred yards: she guessed the barrier would be at least half a mile

away, if it was there.

The light behind her dimmed abruptly, leaving her in a brownish

twilight. Oliver shook the flashlight, switched it off and on again, but it

had little effect.

'We can't do this,' said Mel. 'The batteries won't last.'

'We can run,' said Oliver.

'We don't even know if -' Mel stopped speaking. Her head was

making connections. Electricity - sparks - detonators -

Now she knew why the Germans ought to have had guards here.

Boxes with red crosses on them.

Explosives.

'Oliver,' she asked. 'How much do you know about blowing things

up?'

In the church, Luther watched the Doctor. He watched that face,

turning to the strange light of the device that Grüber called an

Exclusion Generator but might in fact be anything, might as well be

magic. He watched the Doctor's eyes light up in sympathy with it,

watched the curt nod of understanding.

'The crystalline lightwanderer survives on traces of solar energy in

deep space. It's a cold, cold creature. Running energy through it as you

are doing will make it a killer. It will disrupt the matter around it, and

the more power you put through it, the more disruption you'll get. On

the scale you're planning the stress on the Earth's crust alone will send

out a shock wave that will flatten the rest of the planet. And you'll leave

a hole a hundred miles deep. Magma will pour out - dust and ash will

fill the atmosphere - everything will die. Everything. And it will kill the

lightwanderer too.'

The Doctor was all but shouting, his face contorted. His words

echoed from the stone recesses of the church. Herz and Franz stood

silent, their eyes averted. Franz had a hand on the pistol at his hip.

Crouched by the machine, a pad of scribbled calculations in his

hand, Grüber was nodding in time with the Doctor's words, like a



bulky puppet. The blue crystalline light etched lines into his face and

neck.

He spoke, his jaw moving crudely, as if it were wooden. 'You see? It

is as I said.' But he only seemed excited, amazed at the great

possibilities offered by his device. As if it were truly his. Did he care

what it did? His eyes were turned to the light from the central crystal,

but where the Doctor's face had been illuminated with sympathy,

Grüber's burned with the cold flame of obsession.

I have to do something here, thought Luther. His mouth was dry, as

if he were about to go into battle. I am the officer in charge.

But what should he do?

Without warning, Herz kicked the Doctor. It was fast, fierce, like a

snake striking. It connected with the abdomen. The Doctor winced,

and his breath whistled from his throat, but he made no sound.

'Stop that!' snapped Luther.

Herz looked at him. 'The prisoner made an attempt to undermine

our morale,' he said. 'We cannot allow him to tell these lies.'

'It's the truth!' wheezed the Doctor.

Herz kicked him again.

'That's enough, Lieutenant!' Luther walked up to Herz, whispered,

'We may need this man.'

'For what?' The Doctor's voice was choked and glottal. 'What do

you need me for, if you're going to destroy the world?'

'That isn't going to happen!' snapped Luther. 'Herr Grüber, recalibrate the Exclusion Generator for a radius of twenty-five

kilometres. That will be demonstration enough.'

Silence, except for the Doctor's ragged breathing.

Then Herz spoke quietly. 'Herr Oberleutnant, you have disobeyed

the direct orders of the Fuhrer. I am removing you from command of

this expedition.'

Luther stared at him, saw the cold reason in his eyes. A good officer.

It would not occur to Herz to disobey orders, even if it meant the end

of the world.

'Can't you see -?' he began, but realised his mistake. The words died,

frozen in the wilderness of the Lieutenant's face. Persuasion was

wasted. It was a sign of weakness. He should know that. He should use

force.

He turned to Franz, who had already drawn his gun. He opened his

mouth to speak, then, too late, saw the swift glance from Herz to the

tall man, the glint of ice.

Of course. Franz believes in fairy tales. He has spoken to Herz - But

Luther was not ready for the shot, even so. The impact of the bullet

knocked him sideways. He almost fell, recovered his balance. He was

tired. Very suddenly tired. Was he dying?

Echoes of the shot chased themselves around the church.  
Grüber

was standing up, his obsession broken at last. The light from  
the device

seemed brighter - had he switched it on?

Luther knelt, just because he was so tired. He heard Herz  
speaking

again, but the words were mere sounds. They trembled in  
the light.

Franz was walking, his body outlined in deep blue, the  
black-blueness

of coal in sunlight. He looked oddly like a priest, the pistol in  
his hand

a benediction.

He pointed it at the Doctor.

No, said Luther in his mind, but no words came out. The light  
was

crawling in rivers across the floor now, sparking along the  
cables that

suspended the crystal, and Grüber was smiling.

Were there angels?

VI

Oliver heard the shot as Mel was climbing the side of the  
road bridge

below the vicarage. They hadn't gone back by the road.  
They hadn't

dared. Instead they had followed the Otty, the tiny stream  
that ran

under the railway bridge. There was a path beside it,  
brambly and wet,

but unguarded. The stream had made a gentle popping  
sound next to

Oliver as he walked, the dynamite in his arms like an  
awkward

Christmas parcel. He had kept wondering whether the  
explosive would

work, how many people it would kill.

He'd handed it to Mel so that he could climb the bridge, his  
hands

finding the gaps left by missing bricks, a familiar route from  
schoolboy

dares. Then she'd passed it up to him before starting the  
climb herself.

He'd almost dropped it at the echoing sound from the  
church, the

flicker of light.

'Get down!' he hissed at Mel. He thought he could see the  
pale

shape of her face, half way up the wall. She was carrying the fuses -

two, just in case one didn't work. They'd had to smash their way into a

padlocked box to get them. Oliver hoped she knew what she was

doing, that they had everything they needed. Not that it would matter if

the Germans caught them.

A rattle of stone, a breath. Mel was at the top, scrambling over the

parapet. 'You could've given me a hand!' she whispered.

'Shh!'

But Mel was already running towards the church, her footsteps

noisy. Oliver reluctantly followed, thinking about sentries, guns. The

dynamite in its paper wrapping felt heavier now. Drops of sweat were

running down the inside of his shirt. He wanted to wipe them away, but

dared not shift the burden in his hands. Ahead, he could see the dim

lights of the German trucks seeping around the church and the

vicarage. Where was Mel? What was she doing?

He almost bumped into her, crouching by the wall. 'Now!' she

hissed. She held a stubby fuse in her hand, slowly uncoiled it.' We've

got to set it off now!'

There was another shot, frighteningly loud. A cry of pain.

Mel lit the fuse. Oliver handed her the dynamite, sure that this was

dangerous, but what could he do?

'Run!' she snapped.

But Oliver felt the cold metal snout of a gun at the back of his

neck.

'Get up,' said a cold voice, heavily accented. 'Get up now.'

Luther watched Herz shouting at the Doctor, wondering why he wasn't

dead yet. Hadn't Franz shot him?

Perhaps he was dead and this was his first punishment: to see the

consequences of his actions.

Herz fired the gun into the Doctor's leg at close range, then

resumed his barrage of questions. The words meant nothing to Luther:

they were only little demons, sharp-edged, jumping around the light

from the miracle (and yes, it was a miracle: how could he have thought

of it as a machine?). Luther tried to call out, but he couldn't. He

shuffled forward, trying to reach Herz, trying to stop him from hurting

the Doctor any more. But he could only move towards the light.

There was a clatter of sound from outside. After a moment, Luther

recognised gunfire. The Russians are here, he thought. This is our end,

our *Gotterdammerung*.

Except that we were never gods.

Oliver watched, startled, as Mel punched and kicked the fallen soldier.

How had she overpowered him?

Then he saw the burned-out fuse, stuffed into the man's right eye.

He was howling in pain, rolling like an animal.



'The gun!' shouted Mel, as if Oliver were an idiot.

He scrambled for the fallen weapon, picked it up. He heard boots

thudding on soil, a metallic click, an explosion of sound -

- gunfire -

- and light flickering across the wall, the stone breaking. He dropped

to a crouch, looked round and saw Mel behind him standing up,

struggling with the fuse and the dynamite.

'Get down!' he bawled, his words echoing in a sudden silence. But

Mel was lighting a match, and then the fuse. No one fired at her. There

was shouting - shouting in German. Oliver realised he was still holding

the gun, half-crouched. He struggled upright, saw Mel throwing the

bundled explosive.

He thought, That won't work, and sure enough the bundle landed in

the vicarage garden and just lay there, useless. A faint trail of smoke

came from it.

Lights came on, and Oliver saw how many soldiers there were. Four

at least. Two more emerged from the church.

Oliver dropped the gun and raised his hands, but he didn't think

that surrendering would save him.

VII

'Herr Grüber,' said the Doctor. 'You must disconnect the crystal now.'

Luther watched him speak from his vantage against the cold tiles of

the floor. Grüber said something, but the words were blurred grunts.

He looked like a bear, a heavy, dark animal hanging over the crystal.

The light was like fire.

'Do you realise it's a living creature?' urged the Doctor. 'Do you

know what you've done to it by imprisoning it in that machine?'

More grunts. Luther's head was heavy, cold, a brass and iron machine, but by a tremendous effort he lifted it so that he could see the

Doctor. He was lying against one of the huge stone pillars.  
His hands

were still cuffed together. His face was tortured into a scowl,  
perhaps of

pain, perhaps of anger.

'If you do this, Herr Grüber, it will be the end of the world.  
The

end of your "Thousand Year Reich", the end of -'

Grüber barked, like an angry dog.

The Doctor looked down at Luther and their eyes met. The  
Doctor

gave a slight nod.

Life is worth living, thought Luther.

It was a conscious effort to reach out to the clotted  
machinery of

his arms and legs, to begin to shuffle across the floor.  
Zigzags of pain

bit through his chest. The light dimmed, brightened,  
dimmed again.

The Doctor's voice was a constant: - won't be any second  
chances,

won't be any chance at all. You should break it now, now  
before Herz

comes back -'

The bear, distracted, danced in front of the Doctor. Words settled in

Luther's brain: 'duty', 'loyalty', 'superiority'.

Yes. Once I believed in those things, thought Luther. But now I am

dying, and so I believe in life.

A crash behind him, and echoing shouts. Herz was back; Luther

could feel the coldness.

'Oh, yes, kill everyone. That always makes sense.' The Doctor's voice

was heavy with sarcasm, but Luther knew the words were for his

benefit, a translation. He had to get to the light -

Had to get closer, to free the light -

Before -

Oliver stared at the scene in the church, the bizarre machine like a

many-legged insect with the brilliant light in the middle, the wounded

man slumped against a pillar, shouting, the German officer crawling

towards the machine.

'Doctor!' shouted Mel, her voice lighting up. The wounded man

glanced at her once, and seemed to smile. The crawling German officer

was almost at the machine now. What was he doing? Had the Doctor

shot him?

The Lieutenant was running across the church towards him, a

revolver in his hand.

'No!' shouted the wounded man, who must be Mel's friend, the

Doctor. He seemed to be trying to get to his feet, but his legs wouldn't

hold him and he fell to the floor, wincing with pain. The officer glanced

across, but went on and put his gun against the wounded soldier's head.

There was a flash, a thunderclap sound. The floor shook. A window

exploded inwards, showering the stone floor with shards of coloured

glass.

'Yes!'

Mel's ecstatic shout made Oliver realise what had happened:  
the

dynamite had gone off at last.

When the floor shook, Luther knew he had won. He heard  
the glass

falling, and wondered if the Doctor too would die. Probably,  
but it

didn't matter. What mattered was the light, freeing the light.

Consequences were irrelevant.

The Doctor would understand.

With his last strength, Luther stood. He felt his body starting  
to

shake, felt the terrible pain as his heart tripped and stopped.

Then he fell.

It wasn't spectacular. No one except Oliver and the Doctor  
noticed, at

first. The German soldiers were still staring at the broken  
window. The

Lieutenant and three others were running for the door,  
presumably

looking for attackers, leaving only one to guard Oliver and  
Mel.

The wounded officer stood, then fell heavily into the delicate

complex of wires around the crystal. They broke, the crystal fell, and

the light went out. There was a delicate tinkling, which might have been

glass from the window settling.

Then light blazed in from the windows: the true light of a blue sky,

the real light of a summer's evening.

Everyone stopped then, even the soldiers in the doorway, and stared

around them. But the Doctor was still watching the crystal, and Oliver

watched too. Was that a faint blue light, seeping skywards? Or an

illusion, a dazzle from the newly lit windows?

From outside, he heard the sound of aeroplane engines. He turned,

saw the daylight streaming in through the door, the Germans

silhouetted there. A fierce wind started to blow, stirring air inside the

church, moving the trees outside. The German officer pushed past him,

the cloth of his uniform creaking.

'No!' shouted the Doctor, at the same time as the officer shouted a

single word.

Oliver, confused, watched as the officer sank to his knees, his face

darkening. He saw Mel step forward, then back, her hands going to her

face. Her hair was long, he noticed, and red-gold. She looked young.

The officer collapsed sideways, convulsing. Oliver rushed forward,

just in time to see the light fade from his eyes.

Outside, the others were dying, thrashing like broken machines,

their faces darkening in the evening light.

An hour later there was still a deep grey-blue twilight, enough to see

mist creeping over the chilled fields and choking the valley of the

stream. Mel and Oliver stood in the road above the village, almost

where they'd first met. The army hadn't arrived, but the Lancaster had

flown over again and flashed lights down at them. Somebody, Oliver



supposed, would get here soon.

'Will the Doctor be better soon?' Oliver asked. 'He looked badly

hurt.'

Mel shrugged. 'The Doctor? I expect so. He's got all kinds of amazing things in the TARDIS.'

Oliver looked over his shoulder at the curiously English-looking

blue police box. A disguise, Mel had said. Oliver wondered what it

really looked like. He remembered the light in the crystal, remembered

it leaking away into the evening. He knew that Mel and the Doctor

weren't from the Ministry now, at least not any Ministry he knew.

'What's inside the TARDIS?' he asked.

Mel shook her head. 'It's not as exciting as you'd think,' she said. 'All

plastic and bits and pieces. Once you've got over the fact of how big it

is -' She seemed to catch herself. 'I suppose it's fun. Until people get

killed.'

Oliver looked at her. She was beautiful, he thought, beautiful and

sad. 'People get killed all the time,' he said. 'And the Germans deserved

to die.'

She looked at him, frowning. 'No one deserves to die.'

'They killed Ellen. They killed Mr Faraday. They were going to kill

us. They've killed thousands of people, Mel. They deserved poison.'

But Mel just turned and started down the road towards the misty blue

machine.

'I'm going to join the army next year,' he shouted. 'I'm going to kill

Germans!'

There was no reply, just the gentle shutting of a door.

After a while, light strobed from the Doctor's strange, disguised

miracle and it vanished, leaving darkness.

Honest Living

by Jason Loborik

The service had gone on for far too long.

*Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust.*

Kate Forbes couldn't take much more. She surveyed the gathering

of relatives, blank faces, pale and grey, staring at a gaping hole in the

ground which glistened with frost in the bitter December morning.

Some of them had already dissolved into tears, unable to comprehend

the finality of the moment, but Kate just felt numb; she couldn't cry,

not yet. But what if they thought she should be sobbing her heart out

too, that her composure meant she didn't really care? She glanced at

her mother. Her face was a mask, tired and drawn, white with the cold,

her eyes, unblinking, fixed firmly on the hole in the ground.

Kate couldn't stand it. She turned away and scanned the churchyard

for a distraction. Anything. It offered all you'd expect: ranks of

weathered, mildewed headstones, a solitary, leafless tree, patches of

muddy turf, a hunched old gardener. .

Her eyes flicked back to the tree. There was a man standing there,

dressed in black. He hadn't been there a moment ago and couldn't have

got there without her seeing. He was spindly and old, much like the

bare, blackened tree he was standing beneath. He looked like he

belonged there, as if it were perfectly natural for him to spectate at

funerals.

The service had ended and the relatives were dispersing now, some

embracing, some clasping each other for support. Her Aunt Claudia

caught hold of her, eyes brimming with tears and sympathy, and when

she finally shuffled off, Kate turned back to the tree. Her mother was

there, standing next to the stranger, talking to him, her hands clasping

her head. She turned away from him, but he grabbed her arm and

twisted her back to face him. What the hell was he doing to her? Kate

was already running towards them, gripped by sudden  
nausea, her heart

thumping.

'What's going on?' she yelled. Her mother turned to look at  
her, but

as she tried to move away from the man, her legs buckled  
beneath her

and she fell. Kate caught her as she collapsed, sobbing  
hysterically.

'What is it, what did he say to you?'

'He's. . he's. .' choked her mother, tears streaking down her  
lined

face.

Kate looked up at the gnarled tree. The man was gone. She  
shook

her mother. 'Tell me what he said. Who was he?'

As a group of mourners detached itself and hurried over,  
Annie

Forbes recovered enough to finish her words. 'Your father's  
not dead,'

she gasped. 'The man said he's going to live again.'

The mission was a joke, Tuala knew that, but she knew she  
couldn't

disobey orders. She held up the night visor and scrutinised the building

perimeter, noting the positions of the sentries and surveillance systems:

two guards and three antiquated video cameras. Maybe the odds weren't

so bad after all.

Steeling herself, she broke cover and sprinted for the main gate, gun

in one hand, immobiliser in the other. She sped past the cameras and

their red lights blinked then went out. The sentries had barely registered

her presence when they were vaporised by two perfectly aimed laser

bolts.

First stage complete - and it had been child's play; a fact which

nagged at Tuala as she pulled out the tracker and made for the main

building. She made short work of the other CCTVs - at least that's what

she thought they were, she could swear one of them looked like an

ancient stills camera she'd once seen in a history book. She came to the

door of the main building. It was unlocked. Tuala's eyes darted about

the compound, a sickening sensation building in her gut. It was as if

they were helping her. Should she abort, go back? She thought of how

she'd explain that to her uncle, what he would do if she returned

empty-handed. It wasn't an option. She slipped into the building and,

following the tracker, ran up numerous flights of stairs and along

interminable corridors until she finally reached the lab. It was unlit, but

she could make out a tall box in the corner and pieces of scientific

apparatus and circuitry littering the benches. Greedily she began piling

components into her kitbag.

'Can I help you, my dear?'

She spun round. The lights came on, revealing a man at the entrance

to the lab: tall, with a mass of wavy, white hair crowning a beaky-nosed,

lined face. This had to be the Doctor, as Intelligence had suggested. A

pretty blonde in a miniskirt was standing in the doorway of the large

box, rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.

The Doctor was eying her kitbag. 'Perhaps I should say help yourself.'

Tuala had the gun on him in an instant. For some reason, she couldn't seem to hold it steady and she realised she was still panting

from her journey to the lab. The illness must be worse than she

thought. 'What are you doing here?' she demanded. 'My uncle said only

guards patrol this installation at night.'

'Well, your uncle is mistaken. My assistant, Jo, and I occasionally

work into the small hours, if we're busy,' the Doctor explained, as the

blonde girl stifled a yawn. His expression hardened. 'Now, perhaps



you'll explain why you're so interested in my work. .and why you had to

kill two innocent people.'

'Quiet!' Tuala snapped.

Jo was desperately trying to take in what was happening. She'd been up

all night helping the Doctor, who, in a flash of inspiration, had been

convinced he could repair the TARDIS console. But as his own

enthusiasm had waned as yet another dead end was reached, the desire

to sleep had finally overcome her. She'd dozed soundly until the Doctor

had wakened her abruptly, warning her about the intruder.

Suddenly, Jo felt the cold metal of a gun against her temple and she

cried out as her arm was twisted viciously behind her back.

'Don't follow me,' hissed the girl in her ear, 'if you want your friend

to live.'

'Wait,' said the Doctor. 'If you're in trouble, perhaps I can help you.'

The girl seemed to consider this for a moment, then shook her

head. 'We don't need your help. Only these.' She waved the bag of

circuits in the air and dragged Jo out down the corridor.

'Where are you taking me?' gasped Jo.

The girl held the gun up to her face and Jo could see the wild fear in

her eyes. 'I said be quiet.'

Jo looked at her closely. She sounded little more than fifteen, but

her coarse, blistered skin made her appear twice as old. Her teeth were

yellow and broken, her eyes tired and bloodshot, but they burned with

determination.

'Now get moving,' snarled the girl. 'Or you die here.'

The Doctor was already on the radio. 'Brigadier? Are you there, over?'

'I've just arrived at the main gate. It's unguarded. Over.' Even

through the static, the Doctor could detect concern and more than a

little irritation in the Brigadier's voice. 'What the blazes does the

intruder want, Doctor?'

'I'm not sure exactly. Sorry for getting you up at this hour, old chap.'

'I just want to know what's going on, Doctor. Why didn't you let the

patrols intercept her?'

'She's too dangerous, Brigadier. She's killed two people already. I

thought I might be able to reason with her.'

The Brigadier sighed. 'And now she's taken Miss Grant hostage.'

'Yes. Any sign of a getaway car?'

'There's a brand-new Mercedes parked further down the lane. We've

already taken care of it.'

'Good, keep out of sight. I'll follow them in Bessie.'

'But, Doctor -'

'Please, Brigadier, do as I say. The girl is scared out of her wits. I

don't want to put Jo in any more danger.'

'Roger. Out.'

Seconds later, the Brigadier watched Jo and her kidnapper exit the

main gate and pelt down the lane. There was a roar of a revved engine

and as the noise receded into the night, he saw the glare of headlights

as the Doctor's Edwardian jalopy sped out of the gate in pursuit. The

Brigadier shook his head. 'That's fine, Doctor. I'll just go back to bed,

shall I?'

Jo's head slammed against the window as the girl swung the car round

another tight bend. She finally stopped under a broken streetlamp in a

deserted street of derelict Victorian houses, many of which were

boarded up. She pulled off her headband and used it to blindfold Jo.

'Out of the car and walk next to me,' she ordered. 'I will have the

gun on you at all times.'

Jo didn't dare argue. She was led down the street and up a short

flight of steps to a door which the girl opened. The smells within hit

her immediately: a pungent mixture of paint, ozone and fruit. The door

slammed behind her.

'Move forwards,' said the girl.

Jo took a few faltering steps, then stopped dead. Iridescent colours

began to flash and pulse before her eyes. She tried to tear off the

blindfold, but her arms were useless, dead things hanging limply at her

sides. She twisted round, but a fierce heat scorched her skin. She felt

her flesh begin to burn.

*'Come on. .come on. .'*

The voice echoed faintly in the distance, but there were other

sounds now: a cacophony of wails and screeches piercing her eardrums,

almost blotting out the voice so far away: *'Move, or it will destroy you. .'*

But she had no energy, no will to move. Consciousness ebbed away as

she sank slowly to the floor.

*'Jo.. Jo!'*

She felt a sharp slap across her face as the blindfold was ripped

away. Her eyes snapped open and she saw the girl, sitting next to her

on the stairs. 'What was that?' breathed Jo.

The girl was gasping for air. 'Something you could never understand.

Come on, we'd better get out of here.'

Leaning on each other, they limped slowly upstairs. On the landing,

a collection of tables and chairs was blocking their path. The girl turned

to Jo, eyes flashing. 'Someone's been here,' she said accusingly.

Jo said nothing, praying that the Doctor had somehow got there

first.

The girl shoved the obstacles aside and pushed at a door which

appeared jammed. Eventually it gave way and she bundled Jo into the

bedroom beyond. The girl tied her up, then collapsed on the bed,

seemingly exhausted.

Jo looked round the room. It was like a five-star hotel: four-poster

bed, lavish furnishings and decor. How come this girl lived here? 'What

was all that downstairs?' asked Jo, nursing her scorched arms.

'Like I said, you wouldn't understand,' said the girl wearily.

Jo had had enough. 'Look, you kidnap me and bring me to this. This

madhouse. I want some answers. At least tell me your name.'

'Biala,' the girl said dully. Then she sprang back to life, scrambling

over to Jo and pressing a knife to her cheek. Jo could see the sweat on

her forehead; was she ill, or something? She caught some of Tuala's

rank breath and turned away, the knife glinting in her peripheral vision

as Tuala twisted it against her skin. She closed her eyes, petrified, but

the next thing she knew, her bonds had been severed and Tuala was

holding up a plastic bag.

'What's in there?' asked Jo, suspiciously.

'Oranges. Real ones,' said Tuala, as she began to peel one. She

offered it to Jo. 'Eat it,' she encouraged. 'It's good.'

Jo gingerly bit into a segment, while Tuala scoffed one whole. Even

by the Doctor's standards, this was weird.

Standing at the end of the street, the Doctor was tinkering with a

sophisticated, albeit ancient-looking, tracking device. Satisfied, he

flicked a switch and set off down the street, the tracker humming

faintly. Seconds later, it started emitting a high-pitched bleep, and the

Doctor hurriedly muffled it under his jacket for fear of waking the

neighbours - and alerting Jo's captor. He turned it off and looked at the

house - No. 33: a handsome Victorian residence. But why should it

look so well maintained in a street full of dilapidated houses? And why



was the front door wide open?

As he moved to the steps, his foot caught on something.  
Crouching

down, he saw a power cable, partially hidden by fallen  
leaves. He lifted

it up and saw that it led over the side of the steps and into a  
basement

window. He climbed the steps and looked cautiously inside  
the house.

It was an Aladdin's cave. Dozens of oil paintings lined the  
oak-

panelled walls, gold and silver ornaments glinted in the  
opulently

decorated rooms beyond, and period furniture and priceless  
antiques

vied for prominence in the hallway. The paintwork gleamed  
like new,

and as he looked up he saw an intricate crystal chandelier  
glittering

above the treasure trove. Quite a collection, he mused. He  
tried a door

off the hallway and flicked a switch on the wall, but no light  
came on.

As his eyes adjusted, he made out a staircase leading down  
to the cellar.

He produced a torch from his pocket and descended into the gloom.

'Anyone there?' His voice echoed in the darkness.

Reaching the foot of the stairs, his foot caught on the cable again.

He stroked his chin, lost in thought, and followed it to a rusting,

metallic box sitting in the middle of the room, the torchlight picking

out a dial on its surface. It was a safe.

'My turn for a spot of pilfering,' he muttered, setting his sonic

screwdriver to work on the lock. Seconds later, the door opened and

painful brightness spilled into the dingy room. Peering through his

fingers, the Doctor could see a newspaper and a sports bag. He reached

into the safe, but pulled his hand away sharply as a crackle of energy bit

at his fingers. Some kind of force-field, no doubt. He tried again, and

this time was able to grab the bag before his fingers were too badly

burned. He unzipped it gingerly and pulled out a wad of ten-pound

notes, then tossed them aside. He snatched up the local newspaper and

scanned the lead story, blowing fiercely on his singed fingers:

*Business Tycoon in Death Crash.*

*Relatives and staf were last night mourning the sudden death of Bernard*

*Forbes, who was killed yesterday afternoon in a head-on collision with a lorry.*

*Police on the scene commented -*

A scream echoed from upstairs.

'Jo!' The Doctor dropped the newspaper and leapt up the cellar

stairs into the hallway. He looked around. Where had the scream come

from? He heard a scuffle somewhere on the first floor and hared

upstairs, taking three steps at a time. When he got to the bedroom, the

girl from the lab was standing with her arm around Jo's throat, gun

pressed to her head.

The Doctor sighed. 'Surely you must be a little tired of this kidnapping business by now, my dear.'

She glared at him, balefully. 'I warned you not to follow me. Don't

you care if I kill your friend?'

'You know, you don't look like the kind of person who kills for the

fun of it, but I imagine your boss expects you to follow his orders to

the letter. You don't agree with them, but there's nothing you can do.

Am I right?'

The Doctor took a step forward, but sensing the movement the girl

pulled Jo back, her finger tightening on the trigger.

'Doctor!' Jo squeaked, helplessly.

The Doctor's foot connected sharply with the gun and it clattered

against the wall. At the same time Jo shoved the girl backwards into the

wall and ran over to the Doctor, embracing him.

'You all right, Jo?'

Jo nodded, still clinging on to him.

'Now then, young lady,' said the Doctor, gently extricating himself

from Jo's arms. 'Perhaps we can talk in a more civilised fashion. What's

your name?'

The girl said nothing, still rubbing her bruised wrists.

'It's Tuala,' offered Jo.

'How did you find me?' demanded Tuala.

'Well, I've upgraded UNIT's surveillance systems, you see,' replied

the Doctor, with no hint of smugness. 'They can't be immobilised quite

as easily as you imagine. The Brigadier attached a homing device to

your car, then I traced my components with this.' He brandished the

small box-like device, which beeped loudly as he held it up to the bag.

'Please, Doctor, you must let me go,' Tuala whimpered.

'Krashen

will kill me for my failure.'

'Your uncle?'

Tula nodded.

'He has a curious set of family values,' said the Doctor. He considered her. When he'd first seen her in the lab she had acted like a

ruthless guerrilla, now she was behaving like a helpless child. 'You don't

belong to this time, do you? Why are you here? Why did you want to

steal my equipment?'

'I'm sorry, Doctor,' said Tuala, 'I wish I could trust you, but I can't.'

Before the Doctor could react, she grabbed hold of Jo once more,

pulled out a black box and flicked a switch.

'No, wait!' yelled the Doctor, but the two girls had already been

engulfed by a vortex of strobing colours. Seconds later they faded

away. The Doctor looked down at his tracker - the readings were going

haywire. He sighed and switched it off. He had a pretty good idea who

the girl was, but there was nothing he could do for Jo here; his only

lead was the newspaper.

Lost in thought, he made his way back down to the cellar.  
The light

spilling out from the safe was still cold and harsh. The Doctor  
looked

for the bag of money but it had disappeared. Uneasy, he  
picked up the

newspaper and was about to start reading when it began to  
blur before

his eyes. Then it simply winked out of existence.

'Where's the Doctor? What have you done to him?'  
demanded Jo.

Tuala was leaning against a wall, studying a screen on the  
side of the

box. She seemed feverish, finding it difficult to draw breath.

Jo studied her, trying to remember who the girl reminded her  
of.

Someone she'd met recently. .Yes, that was it, those  
guerrillas from the

future who had returned to the present in order to kill Sir  
Reginald

Styles. He was chairing a world peace conference, but they  
believed he

was responsible for the terrible war which would pave the  
way for a

Dalek invasion. Despite the guerrillas' efforts, they had only managed

to trigger the war themselves. What had the Doctor called it? A

temporal paradox. .

This girl wore the same clothes as the guerrillas, carried a similar

gun. .and that box had to be a time machine like the one that had taken

her to the twenty-second century. But how far forward or back through

time had they travelled now?

'My uncle's signalled me his co-ordinates,' said Tuala, looking up

from the screen. 'We must meet him at the rendezvous. Now.'

Jo helped her downstairs, but as they passed the entrance to the

cellar, they froze. Someone was unlocking the front door.

'Quick, in here,' hissed Tuala, bundling Jo down the cellar steps and

closing the door behind her - just as the front door opened.

'Who is it?' whispered Jo.

'You'll find out any second.'



*'Move forwards.'*

The voice was unmistakable: it was Tuala's.

As suddenly as before, the same blinding incandescence filled Jo's

vision, searing the backs of her eyes and the same intense heat seared

her skin, making her scream out in agony as she scrambled down the

stairs to escape the attack.

Then it was over.

'We were lucky,' gasped Tuala weakly. 'We didn't get too close, so

the energy release wasn't fatal. When you travel back in time and meet

your earlier self, time attempts to short out the differential and resolve

the anomaly.'

'So that's what happened before,' Jo murmured.

'I should have realised then.' Tuala managed to heave herself into a

standing position. 'We must reach my uncle. Our machines are too

unstable to use safely any more.'

Jo glared at her. 'So that's why you wanted the Doctor's circuits.

You want to use them for your machine.'

Tuala shrugged. 'That was the original plan, but I need to convince

my uncle that the Doctor is our best hope.'

Jo snorted. 'Why should he help you? All you've done is kill people,

kidnap me, threaten -'

'True,' said Tuala. 'But you don't belong in the past. Imagine if you

met your previous self again. The energy release is never predictable.'

Jo stared at her. 'It could kill me?'

Tuala looked grim. 'You need us to return to your own time.'

Jo's mind reeled at the possibilities: what would it be like to live a

few minutes in the past, trying to avoid her previous self? She decided

to help Tuala, for the time being at least, creeping up to the cellar door

and opening it a little. 'All clear,' she said. 'We went upstairs,

remember?' Quickly, she yanked open the front door and the pair

hurried down the street, not daring to look back.

Minutes later, when the Doctor arrived, the front door was wide

open.

'Good afternoon. Mrs Forbes?'

'Yes, but I'm afraid I don't -'

'Oh, I do beg your pardon.' The Brigadier produced his security

pass. 'I'm Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart of an investigative organisation

called UNIT. This is our scientific adviser, the Doctor. We need to

speak to you about your husband.'

Annie Forbes looked a little baffled. 'Oh. Well, you'd better come

in.'

She led her visitors into the sitting room. 'Please sit down,' she said,

uncertainly, waving in the direction of a sofa. A tray of tea and flapjacks

was already perched on the Queen Anne coffee table, and the Doctor

wondered absently if Mrs Forbes had refreshments on permanent

stand-by in case an unexpected visitor should drop by.

'I must apologise for the intrusion,' continued the Brigadier, rather

embarrassed. 'We appreciate how difficult things must be for you right

now.'

Annie Forbes looked curiously at them, then began pouring the tea.

'I still don't understand what it is you want.'

The Doctor glanced uncertainly at the Brigadier. 'It's about your

husband,' he said. 'It's very important.'

Annie Forbes paused, teacup at her lips, brows furrowed. 'What

about him?'

'I just need to know about the circumstances surrounding his

accident.'

'Accident? What do you know about him?' she said, alarm in her

voice.

On cue, Bernard Forbes shuffled in, a stooped middle-aged man in

a brown cardigan, flannels and slippers. He was carrying a fluffy toy

bird of indeterminate species.

The Brigadier stared at him in surprise, then at the Doctor. 'I thought you told me this man was dead?' he whispered.

'Do you know my friend?' Bernard asked the Doctor, his words

slurred and indistinct.

The Doctor's eyes narrowed as he studied the man before him.

Surely this couldn't be the same Bernard Forbes the newspaper had

described - a supposedly shrewd businessman and entrepreneur?

'Do you know my friend?' Bernard repeated, gesturing to the white

bird.

The Doctor hazarded a guess. 'Know it? Is it a goose. .?'

Bernard's face fell and he stared at the toy, turning it round and

round in his trembling hands.

'What's your name, old chap?' asked the Brigadier.

'Bernard.'

'Bernard who?'

The man glanced at his wife nervously. 'Don't know.' He shuffled

stiffly out of the room without another word.

'He seems to get a little worse every day.' Annie's eyes filled with

tears. 'He's been like that for three weeks now.'

'Do you know why this has happened?' asked the Doctor, gently.

She shook her head. 'The doctors did all sorts of tests on him. At

first they thought it might be a stroke, but they can't find anything at

all. But *you* must know.'

'I'm sorry?'

'You mentioned an accident. Do you know what's happened to him?'

,

The Brigadier fidgeted uneasily in his chair and the Doctor swallowed, patting the woman's hand. 'I'm very sorry, Mrs Forbes. I

don't have any answers. But I'll be back as soon as I discover anything.'

He stood up, nodding at the Brigadier. 'Please excuse us.'

Outside the house, the Brigadier was bursting with questions, but

the Doctor strode ahead, his face grave with concentration. 'Doctor,

how on earth can that man be alive? You told me the newspaper

reported his death in some car accident.'

The Doctor didn't slow his pace. 'No time for questions, Brigadier,'

he snapped. 'We've a potential catastrophe on our hands.'

The Brigadier bristled. 'In which case, you'll need my help, Doctor,'

he retorted. 'And if I'm to help, I'll need some answers.'

The Doctor halted, scratching the back of his neck. 'Yes. Yes, you're

quite right.'

The Brigadier waited. 'Well?'

'That safe. .the newspaper vanishing. .' The Doctor looked at him.

'Bernard Forbes *did* die, just as the newspaper reported. But I believe

our friend Krashen changed history in some way so that he didn't.'

The Brigadier raised an eyebrow. 'Change history? And why would

he want to do that?'

'Money, I imagine. From the amount in his safe and the treasures in

his house, my guess is this isn't the first time he's prevented someone's

death in return for payment.'

The Brigadier regarded him sceptically. 'Isn't that a bit far-fetched,

Doctor? I mean, who is this Krashen, exactly?'

'The girl who kidnapped Jo was wearing combat clothes. And she

has a time machine like the one used by Anat and her friends.'

'Do you mean they're also guerrillas from wherever-it-was? But the

conference is over!'

'I don't think this pair mean to assassinate Sir Reginald Styles. I

think they've simply travelled back to this time to escape the rule of the



Daleks. Yes, to escape, and to enjoy the affluence of the twentieth

century.'

'And I take it they've decided against earning an honest living?'

'Right,' agreed the Doctor. 'Krashen's using his only asset - a time

machine, and a malfunctioning one too, if the readings I took are

correct.'

'So that's why he raided your laboratory?'

The Doctor looked thoughtful. 'If Krashen was in contact with the

rebels he could well have heard of me, yes. .and that raid alone implies

he's becoming desperate.'

The Brigadier was still trying to get to grips with the intricacies of

Krashen's operations. 'Let me see if I've got this straight. When

Bernard Forbes originally died, his wife paid Krashen to prevent his

accident. .But if Bernard Forbes didn't die, then she didn't meet

Krashen, which means she never gave him the money. .' He scratched

his head as his mind boggled. 'The whole thing's absurd.'

'That's right, Brigadier. That's exactly what a temporal paradox is.

Nevertheless, the money existed at least long enough for him to spend

it.'

'But how could it?'

'Well, judging by the energy in that safe, he was keeping the money

in stasis - out of time altogether if you like. But you can't cheat time,

you can only delay the inevitable. I just wonder how long Krashen's

house will remain in its present glorified state.'

'And how long Bernard Forbes will stay alive?'

'Indeed.' The Doctor looked downcast. 'I wish I knew what time is

trying to do to him. Anyway, that's not the biggest problem right now.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, don't you see? We resolved the paradox involving the

guerrillas and Sir Reginald Styles. We saved the peace conference,

World War Three didn't break out. .which means the Daleks didn't

invade in the twenty-second century.'

The Brigadier stared at him. 'So what's Krashen doing in this time at

all?'

The Doctor sighed heavily. 'Exactly. He's a paradox within a paradox, and with Bernard Forbes, he's created yet another. Who

knows how many times he's done this. And if he keeps on. .The

paradoxes could spiral out of control.' He jumped into Bessie.

'And?'

'I don't know. I've never encountered a loop of anomalies like this. I

need to talk to Krashen and send him back before he does any more

damage.'

The Brigadier slid into the passenger seat, his mind reeling. He had

been given plenty of answers, but was feeling none the wiser.

Jo and Tuala ran through seemingly endless streets until they

reached a small crumbling church on the outskirts of town.

'Our rendezvous,' explained Tuala, panting, as she ushered Jo

through the battered doors.

The pair collapsed on the rickety pews, sending clouds of dust into

the cold, stale air.

Jo took in her surroundings - it looked like a bomb had exploded.

Hymn books, rubble and shards of glass littered the cracked stone

floor. Light streamed through the remaining fragments of the stained-

glass window behind the ancient pulpit. The sound of church music

echoed faintly in the gloom, but there was no way it could be coming

from the broken shell of the pipe organ.

'Why here?' asked Jo.

'Ruins such as these are all that exist in our time,' said Tuala.  
'Uncle

often conducts business here. He says it's important never  
to forget

why we're here.'

'So where is he then?'

'I'm here,' echoed a voice.

Jo squinted. A figure was silhouetted against the window,  
moving up

the steps to the pulpit.

'Uncle!' cried Tuala, moving towards him.

Krashen had reached the pulpit and was doubled over it, as  
if

needing it to stay upright.

'You failed, you stupid child,' he snarled. His voice was dry,  
rasping.

'I got the components -'

'Then where are they?'

Tuala looked away.

'Not only that, but you led the Doctor to us. He's opened the  
safe,

and now he knows of our activities.' Krashen broke off in a  
coughing

fit, grasping desperately at Tuala to keep himself standing.

'We need his help, Uncle. Anat's reports were right, he *is* a scientist.'

'But how do you know we can trust him?' growled Krashen.  
'What

if he sends us back? You think I'm ready to give up my life here?'

'Uncle, please listen to me. Our machines are harming us more each

time we use them. They must be damaging time too. I'm sure the effect

is increasing exponentially. We need the Doctor's knowledge.'

Jo swallowed hard. She'd felt ill since her encounter in the house.

Could her journey through time have inflicted some permanent damage

on her?

Krashen turned away from Tuala and faced Jo, as if noticing her for

the first time. 'Who is this?'

'The Doctor's friend.'

Krashen straightened and slowly descended the pulpit steps, towards

Jo. She backed away. All she could see was the refracted light of the

stained glass window, and the silhouette of Krashen as he edged nearer.

He stopped a few feet from her, observing her silently. 'Do you come

from this time?' he asked.

'Yes,' Jo whispered.

Krashen gestured vaguely with his hand. 'Don't you find this beautiful?'

Jo thought he was referring to the derelict church, then realised he

meant the music, which she deduced must be coming from a cassette

player somewhere.

'It's very nice,' she offered, hoping this was adequate praise.

'Bach,' said Krashen. 'The only composer ever to construct melody

and harmony with mathematical precision. .' He paused, mesmerised, as

the music reached an intricate crescendo. 'I'd never heard anything so

pure, so utterly captivating, until I arrived here. Every chord and

cadence so perfectly crafted, not a single note misplaced.. '

Jo shuffled uneasily. Where was all this leading? She felt tired; if she

didn't sit down soon she would collapse. 'What are you going to do to

me?' she whispered.

'Nothing.' Krashen moved closer. 'As long as you co-operate.'

The Doctor swung open the door and looked about the hall in surprise.

It seemed as though the house had been burgled. Many of the paintings

and antiques had disappeared, and the decor - once bright and new -

was now old and tattered. The place had a neglected, musty smell to it

that the Doctor hadn't noticed before.

'Good evening, Doctor. I thought you might return.'

The Doctor squinted in the dim light of a solitary light bulb. He

could just make out a figure halfway up the stairs, wheezing and

rasping, holding tightly to the banister.

'Good evening, Mr Krashen,' he said cheerily. 'You're a lucky man.'



I'd expected your machines to have killed you by now.'

'They are merely faulty.'

'What, both of them? Can't you take them back to the shop, or has

the guarantee run out?'

'I want you to repair them.'

'I suppose Jo's safety comes into this somewhere?'

'Correct. Stabilise our time machines and I will let her live.'

The Doctor's face hardened. 'Without my even paying a fee? That's

very gracious of you. I must say you take the responsibility of deciding

who lives and dies alarmingly lightly.'

Krashen straightened. 'Why should you disapprove of my activities?'

he asked, with seemingly genuine surprise.

'Disapprove of them?' glared the Doctor. 'I find them abhorrent, sir!

You're meddling with the chain of cause and effect, without a thought

for the consequences. .and all for a miserable bag of money!'

Krashen shook his head. 'I use my time machines for good, Doctor.

Take Bernard Forbes - why should he die? A successful career, a loving,

devoted family. Why should they have to come to terms with a

senseless death? I acted to restore their lives.'

'But with what right? Krashen, time decreed the date that Bernard

Forbes died. It happened that way and you can't change it. Nothing

can.' Krashen wasn't listening. 'You haven't seen the horrors of my time,

Doctor. Families torn apart, whole communities decimated. I've

witnessed more human misery and anguish than you can comprehend,

but here, in this time, I have the power to prevent that, if only for a

small number of people. . '

'. .desperate enough to cough up a large sum of money,' finished the

Doctor.

'I saved a small boy who would otherwise have drowned,' continued

Krashen. 'I saw him last week walking in the park with his mother.'

The Doctor groaned loudly. 'Oh, please, Krashen, I simply cannot

comprehend the sheer scale of your philanthropy. Tell me, have you

seen any more of your "chosen few" lately? The state of Mr Forbes, for

example?'

'No,' said Krashen uncertainly.

'He's an imbecile, purposeless. He shouldn't be here. Time knows he

shouldn't be here.'

'You talk of time as if it were a sentient thing.'

'Yes, I do, don't I?' said the Doctor quietly. 'Well, something is

making others suffer the consequences of your actions.'

'Consequences?'

'Yes, man, are you blind?' the Doctor said. 'Look around you.' He

gestured to the light bulb above. 'Where's your pretty chandelier? Why

did the money and newspaper disappear when I took them out of the

safe? You must have known that things were starting to go wrong,

otherwise you wouldn't have built the thing. And why is Bernard

Forbes degenerating before his wife's eyes? Time is rectifying the

anomalies, ever faster. .How long before it's your turn, Krashen?'

'I won't allow that to happen.' Krashen spoke quietly, his voice

faltering.

'Face it man, you don't belong here, you'll never fit in. Leave now,

before it's too late.'

Krashen didn't respond. He started down the steps until he was

standing directly below the light and slowly, deliberately, removed his

hat. The Doctor winced. Krashen's head was a mass of blisters and

lacerations. Black pulsing veins stood out from the dry, scab-encrusted

scalp, thin patches of matted hair unable to disguise ears like melting

wax. In comparison, his face was almost normal, although it was

covered with scars and bruises. But his eyes were his most striking

feature: glacial-blue pools, piercing and hypnotic.

'How did this happen to you?'

'The Daleks,' answered Krashen simply. 'They did this to me because I stole their time machines and built copies for the resistance

fighters. They kept me alive, wanted me to betray my friends, but Tuala

rescued me and we escaped here together. She'd known Anat, knew the

safe places, knew you. Why should I wish to return to certain death? I

love this time. My only wish is to live here in peace.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'You can't, Krashen. I've put events in

the future on to the right track - there was no Dalek invasion. You

shouldn't be here at all.'

Krashen's voice raised in pitch. 'A moment ago you were

condemning me for choosing what could happen and what could not.'

'All that suffering, all the misery you endured was as a direct result

of the ham-fisted meddling of your people with those ridiculous

machines,' stormed the Doctor. 'You don't know what you're doing.'

'And you do?' Krashen challenged.

The Doctor placed his hands on his hips. 'Yes, sir, I most certainly

do.' Krashen indicated the stairs. 'I'm losing patience. Miss Grant is

upstairs. I'm sure you'd like to see her.'

The Doctor calmed down, nodded and followed Krashen as he took

slow, agonising steps up to the bedroom.

When she saw the Doctor, Jo rushed to him and gave him a hug.

'Here we are again, eh, Jo? Are you all right?'

'I think so,' she said uncertainly. 'Just a bit dizzy.'

The Doctor noticed Tuala. She was lying on the bed, pale and

sweating. He looked around the bedroom - something was happening

to the walls. The plush wallpaper seemed to be dissolving,  
powdering

away to reveal cracked, yellowing walls.

'This is madness, Krashen. Can't you see your presence here  
is being

rejected? Go now, before you're erased altogether.'

'Enough, Doctor,' snapped Krashen. He held up the two  
black

boxes. 'Stabilise the machines.'

'I can't. It's too late. Even if I did, it would do you no good.  
Look

around you! Time has finally caught up with you.'

Krashen looked round the room, then screwed his eyes tight,  
falling

towards the Doctor on his knees. His speech was slurred. 'It  
seems you

leave. .me. .no. .'

He stabbed a button on one of the boxes and the Doctor felt  
a

familiar tingling sensation throughout his body as lights  
strobed before

his eyes - he was travelling through time. The lights  
subsided and he

saw they were in the same room, now lavishly decorated and full of

furniture. He felt dizzy, but when he looked around he saw that the

others had been far worse affected by the journey. Krashen was leaning

against Tuala and Jo had her eyes closed as if trying to regain her sense

of balance.

'Now,' said Krashen wearily, 'do as I say, or your friend dies.'

The Doctor glared at him. 'What do you mean?'

Krashen didn't reply. He collapsed and Tuala fell with him, unable

to support his weight. 'Uncle! Uncle!' she screamed.

The Doctor rushed over and knelt down beside Krashen's inert

form. 'He's out cold, poor chap,' he said. He examined the time

machine that had transported them.

'How far back have we travelled?' asked Jo.

'Ten hours, thirty-five minutes, if this read-out is correct,' said the

Doctor.



Tuala looked up, startled. 'That means we've been taken back to last

night,' she said.

Jo frowned. 'So?'

'That's when I first brought you into this room. Don't you remember?'

'You mean we could meet our other selves again?'

'Yes - at any moment.'

Tuala stood up, but as she did so she let out a piercing scream. She

clutched her head and dropped to the floor once more, twisting in

excruciating pain. 'Help me,' she wailed.

The Doctor watched in horror as her form shimmered and glowed,

then faded away. A patch of the wall behind her was glowing brightly,

as if it were on fire.

'It's followed us,' murmured the Doctor. 'It won't give up until the

last paradox has been resolved.'

Jo was confused. 'What's followed us?'

'Time, Jo. It wants us all!'

'Get her back, Doctor!' cried Jo. 'Please try!'

Desperately, the Doctor tried to wire his tracking device into the

time machine. 'I'm sorry, Jo, I've lost her.'

'Will that happen to us? Can't we just run away from here?' She

indicated the wall, where the glowing patch was growing larger,

radiating more fiercely.

'It's too risky. We might meet your other self.'

Jo shivered. 'I know. It happened to me earlier.' She brightened. 'It

hurt me but I was all right. It can't be that bad, can it? And anyway,

when Tuala and I came into this room last night, there was no sign of

me and you. Doesn't that mean you'll get the time machines working

properly?'

'No, Jo!' he snapped. 'With this accumulation of paradoxes, the past

is no longer immutable. Time will take whatever course is necessary to

resolve the final anomalies.'

'What does that mean?'

'I've no idea. The resultant implosion of Blinovitch energy could

take us with it - us, this house, even this city.' The Doctor could see Jo

was struggling to understand, and his tone softened. 'Come on, Jo. Help

me buy some time.'

'How?'

'I want you to barricade the landing, use whatever you can to

prevent your earlier self from entering this room. Then jam the door.

Understood?'

Jo nodded and sped out of the bedroom door. The Doctor glanced

at the glowing wall, incandescent now, then turned his attention to the

microcircuitry of the time machine. Several components and linkages

had apparently melted away - there was no way that the machine could

achieve molecular stabilisation of its subjects. But what had caused this?

Was it misuse, an accident. .or could time itself have somehow

engineered the malfunction in order to eradicate Krashen?  
The Doctor

shuddered at the implications. Repairing the damage was child's play,

with time and the correct tools - neither of which he had. He selected

the microwelding adjustment on his sonic screwdriver and, glancing up

occasionally as Jo built her barricade, worked furiously on the broken

linkages. Hands clammy with sweat, he went as quickly as he dared, but

as he made the final delicate adjustment, the circuit sparked suddenly

and the screwdriver stopped working. The Doctor realised the spark

had overloaded the microwelding tip. He'd ordered Jo to buy him a few

more seconds of time, and now he'd just thrown them away.

Jo appeared in the doorway, breathless. 'We. .they're here already.'

'Jam the door, Jo,' he ordered. 'Then hide yourself under the bed.

You must be as far from your other self as possible.'

Jo obeyed without a word. She snatched up a door stop and kicked

it under the door. 'It won't. .it didn't hold Tuala for long,' she said. She

was about to crawl under the bed, when it shimmered and faded away.

'Doctor!' she cried.

The Doctor rummaged in his pocket and took out a safety pin. He

unclasped it and held the pin against the circuitry of the time machine,

and the screwdriver to the pin. If he could agitate the pin's ionic

substructure to a sufficient degree. .it would either complete the final

connection or short out the entire machine. He paused.

'Hurry, Doctor!'

The Doctor looked at her, activating the screwdriver. 'Even if the

device works, we could be left drifting helplessly in the vortex for

eternity.'

The handle of the door turned and the door shook as Tuala threw

her weight against it.

The wall burned fiercely, the heat beginning to scorch their skin.

'Just do it, Doctor!' Jo shouted. 'Do it!'

The Doctor's fingers began to burn. The pin glowed red hot.

Then the circuit was complete and the room exploded.

'Doctor? Doctor, are you all right?'

A familiar, moustached face swam into focus. 'Brigadier,' the Doctor

croaked. 'Did it. .Is Jo. .?'

'You've both had a lucky escape by the look of things,' said the

Brigadier.

'Where. .where did you find us?'

'In that old house. Unconscious. No sign of the Merc, the tracker

was just lying in the street outside. No sign of that Krashen fellow,

either, or the girl.'

'Time must have corrected the paradox,' mused the Doctor,  
'and

returned him to his rightful place in time. Tuala too, I hope.'

Within minutes, the Doctor was up and dressed. After  
examining

the still-unconscious Jo, he instructed the sickbay staff to  
keep her

under observation. Her body needed time to readjust after  
the

destabilising effects of the time machine.

Wandering back to his lab, he stopped in the filing room to  
look at

the papers. He rifled through the pile and found the same  
newspaper

Krashen had had in his safe. His heart sank as he read the  
front page.

No mention of an accident, or Bernard Forbes's death. The  
Doctor

brooded. Why hadn't time simply allowed the accident to  
happen after

all? Presumably it was choosing a more expedient path.

The Brigadier saw the Doctor leave the building, heading for

Bessie's garage, his cloak billowing in the wind. 'Doctor!  
Good news,'

he called after him. 'Miss Grant's coming round.'

But the Doctor didn't hear. He had other things on his mind.

Kate Forbes stared into space, absently drinking her tea.  
Dimly, she

was aware of her mother answering the door and she heard  
the voice

of a man in the hallway.

'Mrs Forbes? I'm so sorry to trouble you again.'

'Oh, it's you. You said you'd come back.'

They entered the sitting room and Kate stared at the man,  
but for

some reason he wouldn't meet her gaze. Her mother had  
started

sobbing and she stood up, embracing her gently. Kate  
looked at the

stranger, but he still wouldn't look her in the eye. 'What are  
you doing

here again?' she said. 'Can't you see how upset she is?'

The man stood for a moment, then raised his head. 'Please.  
Tell me

what happened.'

Her mother turned back to him. 'I was in the kitchen making  
the



tea. I'd left him watching television. When I went back to the sitting

room, he'd vanished. The front door was locked.. '

She broke down again, and this time the man held her, patting her

uncertainly on the back.

'He's not coming back, is he?'

The man didn't speak.

'Is he?'

'No, my dear. I'm afraid he isn't.'

Dead Time

by Andrew Miller

It was cold. Freezing. The darkness was so thick and oppressive, the

Doctor found himself wondering whether the walls and roof were

actually fashioned from it, from patches of night sky resentful that no

stars had ever shone in their confines. He had been standing, rooted to

the spot, for what seemed like an eternity. His senses were dulled with

both pain and the tedium of his incarceration. In this place  
the

moments, the minutes, the hours seemed so stretched out  
that the

words lost all meaning. He felt his face with numbed fingers,  
reminded

himself of what he was, who he was. And Sam, his  
companion, his

friend.. taken from him and held somewhere out there in the  
blackness.

He could picture her growing older as his struggles  
continued, her

blonde hair turning grey, her wiry body wizening, her clear  
young skin

wrinkling in this dark and empty place.

'We know you now, Doctor.' The voice was a mocking  
whisper, but the

loudest whisper he had ever heard, up close in his ears. 'We  
are going to

use you, to take from you what we need. We have been  
waiting so long

and so patiently for somebody like you. .one of us.' The  
sinister voice

emitted a low moan of pleasure. 'And we are going to kill  
you, Doctor.

We are going to kill you so slowly, so tenderly, you won't even

realise. .and when the moment of your death has come, we will gloat

over your memory through the aeons ahead, for the freezing chill bred

in this darkness will make you a monument to us, will keep your

memory fresh and dead and ours. No one else's. Ours for ever.'

The Doctor said nothing, eyes closed and mouth clamped shut. But

he knew the whispering spectre was telling the truth. And he could tell

for certain that whatever was speaking to him was utterly mad.

Another voice came to him, echoing eerily through the void. A girl's

voice. Sam's voice.

'It's like being in a tomb, shut in with only the darkness. It's so, so

black in here. .Oh, Doctor. .it's like nothing else has ever existed -

everyone I've ever known, everywhere I've ever been. . it's like all that

was just some kind of a dream.'

'It's only when I use crap cliches like that that I realise there has to

have been something else.'

'Sam?' whispered the Doctor. 'Sam! Are you all right?'

But the mirthless laughter in his ear told him that she was still

somewhere else, that he had been allowed only to listen in on her

thoughts for a few moments. The forces here were trying to distract

him while they found some new way of burrowing inside his psychic

defences. .Reminding him that it was his fault that Sam was helpless in

the blackness. He was the one who had brought her here.

Memories. .Eyes still tightly shut, though it made no difference to

the darkness, he remembered..

The TARDIS was a long way out, tumbling through space and time,

when the Doctor realised that, as was so often the case when you were

a wanderer in the fourth and fifth dimensions, something was wrong.

An insistent beep was coming from somewhere on the wooden

hexagonal console that was the heart of the TARDIS's guidance

systems.

'What is it, Doctor?' asked Sam.

'Oh, the old girl's just being a little overcautious. We may be in for a

bit of a bumpy ride, that's all. She's telling us something odd's

happening to the time parameters.'

'What sort of odd?' asked Sam. 'What's wrong *now*?' Things were

always going wrong around the Doctor, and by now she had developed

a kind of Sam Jones-Richter scale of danger to measure them against.

The Doctor shrugged. 'Ah, well, you know - freak ripple effect, a

Lucrece shift, something along those lines.'

'Oh, that's all right, then,' said Sam, rolling her eyes.

Unaware of the sarcasm, the Doctor seemed genuinely pleased to

have put his friend at ease. 'There's really nothing to worry about. It's

only if that red light starts flashing at the same time that we -'

'This red light?' said Sam, affecting a casual air.

As the Doctor peered at the display Sam was pointing to, an enormous explosion threw them to the floor of the TARDIS. The

protesting scream of overworked engines sounded from somewhere

deep in the heart of the ship.

'Yes, that's the one,' confirmed the Doctor ruefully, as tremors

shook through the control room. 'Hold on!' he yelled as the TARDIS

vibrated and trembled as if afraid of where it was going.

A klaxon sounded and instrumentation sparked and spluttered

around them. Abruptly, the control room was plunged into darkness.

Something - probably one of the large bronze statues at the periphery

of the control room - crashed to the ground, and Sam cried out

involuntarily.

The sound echoed eerily around her, then died away into silence. A

chill ran through her.

'Listen. .' she whispered in the gloom. 'The TARDIS.. It's stopped!'

The comforting hum of the control room's incredible technology had

been replaced by an oppressive silence.

About 8.5 on the Jones-Richter scale.

She listened as the Doctor's fingers flickered over the controls, the

sounds seemingly everywhere at once. In response to his caresses, an

eerie yellow luminescence bled into the grey stone of the TARDIS

walls. In the dim emergency lighting, the Doctor's face was lined with

worry.

'We're in deep space,' he muttered. 'Deepest space. There shouldn't

be anything out here. Not for millions of years.'

'How can you be sure?' asked Sam.

The Doctor scowled. 'On my planet, children in nursery know that.'

Sam was stung by his reaction, but saw how troubled he looked and

walked over to him, tugging lightly on his coat sleeve. 'So where are we?

'

'I don't know,' he replied.

'Perhaps we should ask the nursery children?' she inquired, with

mock politeness.

The Doctor looked set to make a caustic reply, but his face softened

before the words could come out, relaxing into a smile. Sam smiled

back at him. 'What time are we in?'

The Doctor crossed over to the chronometric display. 'We're. . How

odd.'

'Deeply peculiar,' affirmed Sam, nodding her head authoritatively.

'What are you talking about?'



The Doctor was scrutinising some ticker tape chattering out from a

brass housing. 'The read-out's shifting. .It won't settle.' He frowned.

'According to this, we've landed in countless different times all at once,

over a span of thousands of years.'

Sam frowned. 'Is it up the spout? How can we be in different times

all at the *same* time?'

'How indeed?' brooded the Doctor. 'Perhaps that's why we've lost

power. Simultaneous arrival in hundreds of different time zones. .'

'Like falling into a shredder. .?'

'Precisely,' murmured the Doctor. 'We're lucky to be alive.'

Sam looked at him as he stared straight ahead, his face shrouded in

shadow.

'Is it a trap?'

'Perhaps.' Catching her worried look, he smiled. 'Or a natural occurrence - there's always that possibility. In any case, we're rather

stuck here until I can work out if the process is reversible.'

'If. Right. And where exactly *is* here?'

The Doctor shrugged at her as he scrutinised further controls. 'No

clear reading of mass. .It's certainly not a planet. .Seems to be made up

of layers and layers of material the TARDIS can't recognise, and yet. .I

have a feeling. .'

'Some kind of cosmic papier-mache?' ventured Sam, and to her

surprise the Doctor grinned broadly.

'Precisely,' he said. 'But how did they come by so much paste in the

middle of a void, hmm?'

He activated the scanner, but there was only blackness as the old-

fashioned monitor warmed up to show them the exterior view. They

waited for some time.

'Scanner's broken,' said Sam.

The Doctor took a deep breath. 'No. That's what's out there.'

*'We're going to rip right through you, Doctor. You're going to die. You're going to*

*die. We're going back and we're going to kill you kill you kill you. .'*

The Doctor felt the whispering demons pulling at his memories,

twisting them, devouring them, attempting to erase them..  
He stayed

calm, eyes shut, retreating into himself. .It was like trying to keep

control of a huge house full of wild children tearing from room to

room. What a pity, he reflected, that his mind contained so many places

to hide.

Suddenly the Doctor could hear cries of anguish over the mad

jabbering of the whispering voices. They were coming from Sam.

'No. .please, let her go! Stop hurting her!'

*'We're going to kill, kill, kill you. .'*

But even as the Doctor was distracted by Sam's distress, he realised

that the voices in his mind were taking the scraps of thought and

memory he was sacrificing to the battle for control and building a new

image - pale. .yellow. .a bloom of some kind.. flowers, tranquil against a

deep indigo sky that was glittering with stars.

He recognised the flowers. .recognised them from an age long

distant when, as a young boy on Gallifrey, he had watched funerals

being conducted with pomp and magnificent ceremony. The flowers,

almost invisible at first, so far were they from the eye, dropped

fluttering from the far reaches of the vast cathedral-like arches of the

Panopticon and on to the crowd of mourners far below. As a child it

had been easy to believe that the flowers had fallen from heaven itself.

They were the Gallifreyan flowers of remembrance.

Somewhere in the dark, Sam remembered..

'You can't go outside alone, Doctor!' she protested. 'You've no idea

what's there!'

'Then I'll find the light switch!'

'And what if you can't breathe? If the controls are giving faulty read-

outs?'

'I can go without air for some time, Sam, you know that.

Besides. .it's as if - as if I should *know* where we are.' With that, he

pulled the large brass lever that opened the doors and left the dimly lit

sanctuary of the TARDIS for the comfortless dark outside.

'There's air here,' the Doctor called back, then started as he realised

Sam was at his side already.

'You don't think I'm going to let you go off out here by yourself, do

you? Probably end up enjoying yourself poking around - you'll forget all

about me!' said Sam with what she knew the Doctor would realise was

forced cheerfulness.

'Tread carefully,' was his only answer. He lit a match, but although it

burned brightly, it lit up nothing of their surroundings. Puffing it out,

he produced a torch from the pocket of his frock coat instead. 'Less

Gothic,' he apologised, 'but never mind.. '

The torch beam shone brightly but still they could make out nothing

but shadows.

'I suppose there's no point going back to the TARDIS, is there?'

Sam asked tentatively. 'We could wait there.'

'Wait?' queried the Doctor. 'For what?'

'I don't know. .It's like. .It feels like something's going to happen

here.'

The Doctor stared at her a little strangely. Suddenly embarrassed,

Sam started striding confidently off into the darkness.

'Sam!' called the Doctor suddenly, whipping out a hand and grabbing hold of her T-shirt. 'Don't go marching off like that. You

might step in something. Here, take this.'

Sam felt smooth fabric being wrapped around her wrist, and realised

it was the Doctor's silk cravat, its silver-grey colouring lost in the

unrelieved blackness.

Since she was blushing anyway, Sam ventured casually, 'Have we just

tied the knot?'

The Doctor simply said, 'This should keep us together.'

They moved off warily. It felt to Sam a little like walking on sponge,

the way the dark surface of this place absorbed the noise of their

footsteps.

'What's this?' she said, groping the air in front of her and touching

something solid and fibrous. 'A wall?'

'It's some kind of archway,' confirmed the Doctor.

The 'wall' was smooth, but she couldn't decide whether it was hard

or soft, warm or cool to the touch; it just .was. That seemed to sum up

this place. Somewhere that just was.

The Doctor led the way as they moved cautiously through the

narrow tunnel. It twisted round and round, becoming narrower and

narrower, when suddenly the Doctor stopped dead and she bumped

into him with a cry of alarm.

'Shh!' hissed the Doctor. 'There's something up ahead.'

Sam turned behind her then, as if a voice had whispered her name.

She caught a glimpse of something moving, a dull, pale-gold shadow

some way off, just for a moment.

Then it was gone.

The more the babbling creatures caused havoc in the Doctor's head, the

more the confines of this dark citadel were dimly illuminated; the more

concrete and definite the sinister shadow of the giant man clawing at

his head became, towering over him. He closed his eyes once again.

Was this another attempt to make him lose his concentration, to

surrender to whatever force was inside his mind? The Doctor wasn't all



that concerned about the damage the creatures could be doing to his

synapses; he felt strong enough at present to resist their probing, and

was keeping their subtle re-routings of his neural pathways to a

minimum. What really bothered him was the ease with which they were

moving round his mind.. He himself found it a baffling, confusing place

to be at times, particularly soon after a regeneration. How had these

shadows gained access so effectively?

Running round like children.

Like children in a nursery.

The Doctor remembered talking to Sam back in the TARDIS soon

after they'd arrived here. .

Sam remembered..

The sharp tug on the cravat wrapped round her wrist bade her

follow the Doctor, and although she opened her mouth to tell him

what she had seen, she suddenly decided against it. What if she had

imagined it? The Doctor needed someone he could rely on in his

travels through the cosmos, not a stupid schoolgirl who jumped at her

own shadow. Play it cool, Sam. Say nothing. It was nothing.

She cast a look over her shoulder despite herself but there was

nothing but the pitch blackness.

She cursed the TARDIS for having to land them here, then cursed

whatever had actually made it do so, then cursed the gold thing she had

glimpsed.. This seemed exactly like being in a bad dream. There seemed

no logic to it, no obvious way to respond. Miserably, she accepted that

she was totally out of her depth. So, she reflected a little sadly, as usual

all she could do was trust in the Doctor.

But what if the Doctor was out of his depth too?

They rounded the corner of the narrow, twisted passage and the

Doctor stopped abruptly. They were on a precipice and, for the first

time since they'd left the TARDIS, Sam could feel something akin to a

breeze. Pinpricks of painfully bright light sparkled, but it was difficult at

first to tell just how far away they were. Then the lights began to appear

more frequently, like glow-worms in a vast underground tunnel.

Sam peered into the gloom. She could discern shapes in the

darkness now, like shadows stretched and twisted into things they were

not. Half-formed, stunted shapes that could have been people littered

the giant cavern of darkness as if their creators had grown bored

sculpting them and had abandoned them where they stood. A shiver of

fear ran through her at the sheer scale of it all.

'What is it, Doctor?' she whispered, relieved at least to be able to

make out the tall figure of her friend beside her.

The Doctor was transfixed. 'Those flashes,' he muttered. 'I

wonder. .'

Some of the points of light had begun to coalesce, forming faint

patches of luminous mist. In the light they cast, Sam could see that the

shapes had distorted, screwed-up faces that should never have been

seen this way, the features pinched and pulled. Fear, pain, confusion:

basic terrifying emotions in their rawest state seemed to have been

carved into these tortured beings.

Then she noticed. The cloud of light was getting brighter, stronger.

Closer.

'Back away, Sam,' hissed the Doctor.

'What -?'

' *Back away!* '

Together, they turned and stumbled blindly into the tunnel. Casting

a look over her shoulder, Sam could see the patch of light floating

towards them.

'It's following us!'

'Quickly,' said the Doctor. 'Down here.'

Once Sam had realised that whatever material formed this place was

too fibrous to cause any real physical harm upon impact it made it

easier to run like hell. The two of them jostled against each other in the

darkness as they pitched forwards at high speed ever deeper into the

nothingness.

'Do you know where you're going?' panted Sam.

'Possibly,' replied the Doctor enigmatically.

Everything was silent as they ran, but after some time Sam realised

that their footfalls were sounding louder, that the fabric beneath their

feet was changing, growing harder, almost like stone. Gradually, she

could hear something else, what felt at first like a low pressure in her

ears but soon became a throbbing, insistent hum. With the noise came

a faint phosphorescence around them. She stopped running.

'Doctor -'

'Shh, Sam. I know.'

The Doctor too had stopped. Then with a tug on the cravat to pull

Sam along, he strolled almost casually forward into what seemed like a

vast, gloomy amphitheatre. As they stepped inside, the deep, sonorous

noise became louder. It sounded in some way familiar. .a noise she had

grown used to, distorted and twisted, broken up as if heard through

giant, crackling, rattling loudspeakers.

'Well, well,' murmured the Doctor sullenly.

Sam could make out weird indentations in the walls, like half-

formed circles. Lumps of the spongy black material that composed this

alien place were tilting up from the uncertain flooring: a huge hexagonal

protuberance grew from the middle of the huge chamber and a giant

statue of what might have been a man, clutching a bizarre black shape

that was surely its head, towered menacingly some twenty feet above

them.

'Well, Doctor?'

'Don't you see, Sam? Of course, since I reconfigured the console

room.. ' The Doctor untied his cravat from her wrist and draped it back

round his neck. 'All this was once alive, pulsing with power. .the power

to travel anywhere in time to any point in the universe.' He smiled

sadly. 'We've spent all this time running round a derelict in space. .all

that's left of the ragged hulk of an ancient, dying TARDIS.'

'A TARDIS? Of course. .' Sam realised what the noise had reminded

her of, although it was a far cry from the clean, comforting hum of the

TARDIS she knew. This noise conveyed sickness. Pain. As the Doctor

had said.. death.

A thought struck her. 'So did it come from your planet?'

'Almost definitely.'

'And what about him?' Sam gestured to the huge distorted figure, its

head in its hands. 'Were there many giants there last time you looked?'

The Doctor ignored Sam's remark and gazed around him. 'There's

something more than just decay affecting this place. The whole aspect

has changed, warped around the original way of things. I can just about

recognise the design. .enough to know it would have been taken out of

service millennia ago -' He stopped abruptly with a sharp intake of

breath. When he spoke again, it was in a rushed whisper. 'One of the

earliest time-space vessels.'

'Is that significant?' queried Sam.

The Doctor looked as if he were about to launch into one of his

famous flaps. 'What is significant is that we seem to have activated

something. Switched it back on.' Along with the pleading low whine of



power in the room, the deformed roundels in the walls  
pulsed with a

faint light, as if attempting to emulate the emergency  
lighting of the

Doctor's TARDIS.

'You think we tripped something?'

'I think it knows I'm a Time Lord and is responding to my  
presence,' said the Doctor, distantly, still looking around in  
sad wonder

at the malformed magnificence of the ancient edifice they  
stood in.

Sam swallowed hard in the gloom and took a deep breath.  
'I've got

to tell you, Doctor, it's been bothering me. I saw something  
earlier - I

mean, I think I did -'

'Saw something?' He was looking at her strangely again.  
'When?'

'Back in the tunnels before we saw the giant's playroom out  
there. .I

know it sounds stupid, but it was. .gold-coloured. Sort of like  
fluid.' She

realised the Doctor was looking past her. 'Er, hello? You did  
ask.'

The Doctor straightened up and motioned her towards him.  
As she

moved, he spun her gently around so they were looking the  
same way.

'If you see it again, could you ask *it* to ask *that* to kindly go  
away and

stop bothering us?'

The luminous cloud that had pursued them before was  
suddenly

there, hovering in the warped doorway. It was as if the  
sparks and

traces of light within it were attempting to depict some kind  
of image.

Sam thought she could see the ghosts of humanoid figures  
trapped in

torment, struggling to get free of the light that bound them.

It hovered near them.

'Confuse it?' asked Sam, looking up at the Doctor.

He nodded. 'We'll split up,' he said. 'You go round the back  
of the

console, try and get its attention. We've got to lure it away  
from the

door. .'

He gave her a gentle push to get her going, and she sprinted over to

the far side of the huge black outgrowth. 'Come on then! If you think

you're hard enough!' she bawled at it, her words echoing around the

dismal chamber.

Suddenly, the light cloud changed its slow but relentless course.

'Doctor!' Sam cried warningly. 'It's after *you*!'

'Run, Sam. Get back to our TARDIS, quickly.'

'I can't just leave you to that -' Sam broke off as a glimmer of light

down the dark passage caught her eye. She shivered; for a moment she

could see someone standing like a statue in the faint glow.

It was herself, arms outstretched as if trying to push away something

terrible.

' *Run, Sam!* '

But Sam was already moving steadily towards her likeness, through

the door and into the dark corridor beyond, as if drawn on irresistibly

in some way. The image was fading now into a grey mist.  
She felt

fascinated and horrified at the same time. What the hell was  
going -

Something moved at Sam's feet, like a trail of dull gold  
spinning

upwards in a spiral. As she jumped instinctively, she still felt  
a thrill of

satisfaction. 'Didn't dream you then - worst luck,' she  
muttered, as she

found herself twisting round to follow it, arms raised to  
defend herself.

Abruptly she felt her body freeze. She knew in an instant  
she had

become the image that had transfixed her. Unable even to  
cry out, she

felt the dull gold pour into her eyes and nose and mouth.

The last thing she saw before the blackness swallowed her  
was the

Doctor, standing stock still in front of the looming statue of  
the giant

figure as the cloud of light burst over him.

'We know who you are, Doctor. We know where you come  
from.

Where you can take us.'

'I can't take you anywhere. Landing inside your TARDIS has fractured my own.'

'It is not our TARDIS, and we do not need yours.'

'Well, it really is a terribly long walk to the nearest inhabited stellar

system and I don't know where you intend to -'

The Doctor broke off as he felt something biting into the back of

his mind as if it were a nice fat, juicy steak. He shuddered, willing the

feeling out of his thoughts.

'What is it you really want?' The Doctor voiced the words out loud

through gritted teeth.

'Freedom again, Doctor, freedom to move. .' hissed the whisper. 'To

travel.. to our remembrance.'

'If you'd only stop speaking in riddles, perhaps I could help -'

'You *will* help us, Doctor. .you will help us as you die, as you die, as

you go back and back, further and further, younger and younger, and

die. . *taking us where we need to go!* '

The Doctor screwed his eyes tight shut once again. He felt the

presence there behind them bracing itself for a stronger attack. Then he

shut down his cardiovascular system and retreated inside himself. Held

in stasis by the light cloud, his body barely moved as all signs of life left

it.

'That won't do you any good.'

The Doctor opened his eyes. The voice was familiar. It belonged to

the figure sitting in a comfortable chair by an old mahogany table,

pouring himself a cup of tea.

'That's my best china you're using!' said the Doctor, a little tetchily,

rubbing his forehead.

The figure simply gave him a cheery smile, but the Doctor found

himself frowning. There was something infuriatingly familiar about this

man in his dark-green velvet frock coat, grey trousers and white wing-

collar shirt -

'You're me!' said the Doctor, rather indignantly. 'What are you doing

serving me tea inside my head?'

'Well, it is my head too, after all,' this Other-Doctor reminded him.

'I'm not exactly trespassing.' He continued pouring the tea, passing a

cup to the Doctor, who accepted it with bad grace. 'Nice try,' said the

Other-Doctor, as if measuring him up, 'shutting down your body to

consolidate your strength of mind. But it didn't confuse them for long.'

'Didn't?' queried the Doctor. 'What do you mean, "didn't"?''

'I know your head is under siege right now, but do try to use what

bits you can, hmm?'

The Doctor looked at himself quizzically. 'You're from my - our

future?'

'Precisely!' grinned the Other-Doctor, but his smile soon faded.

'And no, I'm not a trick, or an illusion. This ancient TARDIS's

telepathic circuits have corroded to the point of dissolution. I was able

to use vestigial spillage from them to send an aspect of myself back to

myself - well, to you.'

'Very clever,' said the Doctor appreciatively. 'Exactly what I'd have

done myself, if I was on the verge of death and had to get a warning

across to. .'

The Other-Doctor nodded, a gentle smile on his face as the Doctor

tailed off. 'It's our last chance.'

'What about Sam?' asked the Doctor hopefully.

'Oh, these idiots will release her soon, unharmed. Humans can't aid

them in their plans and they think it the most wonderful fun to let her

watch me die before. .'

The Other-Doctor paused. 'Yes, well, never

mind all that. They end up getting so chatty they practically bore us to

death. .'

He shook his head. 'They're insane, but massively powerful and



well adapted. We've got no more resistance left in just a few hours from

now. This was as far back as I could reach me - you, I mean. I know it

goes against the laws of time, but if we don't do something soon there

may *be* no laws of time left to break.' The Other-Doctor sipped his tea.

'Biscuit?'

The Doctor took a ginger cream from the proffered plate and dunked it. 'What are these creatures?'

'The Forgotten,' whispered the Other-Doctor theatrically. That's the

name they've given themselves: He slurped noisily from his saucer. 'It's

no wonder they've been forgotten - just one more shameful secret in

the dark scrolls of Gallifrey's history: memory-surfers, using the

cerebral cortexes of Time Lords for high tide.'

'What?' The Doctor was incredulous, and yet a dim memory rattled

in the back of his head. He wondered vaguely whether that was north,

east, south or west of where they seemed to be standing now.

'Yes, it's starting to come back now, isn't it? Way, way back, when

the Amplified Panatropic Neural Network of Gaffifrey was created,

when the minds of our dead were converted into so many neural

complexes arranged in a matrix pattern to form the repository of all

Time Lord knowledge -'

The Doctor cleared his throat. 'Ah, would you mind sparing me the

lecture? Talking to yourself is a terrible habit and I imagine we're

running out of time to break it.'

The Other-Doctor took another solemn swig of tea and continued.

'A group of Time Lords working on the neural mechanics of the Matrix

learned all sorts of secrets in the course of their work. They reasoned

that through exploiting an individual's reserves of artron energy it

should be theoretically possible to travel through a Time Lord's actual

physical past.'

'What?' The Doctor's eyes narrowed as he frowned in disbelief.

'Oh, yes. Each microsecond of experienced life is stored in our

minds. Makes sense - it explains why the APC Net is so terribly

efficient at pondering the Time Lords' imponderables.'

'Why it's the ultimate contemplator of Gallifreyan navels, you mean.

Go on.'

'I'm sure you can imagine the rest. In their arrogance, their boredom, their irresponsible quest for thrills, this bunch of forgotten

nitwits underwent a temporary conversion into aggressive electrochemical impulses and got into some poor soul's head.

Back. .back through the hundreds of years he'd lived, and then

upstream to their present. And on their little jaunt they learned another

secret.'

The Doctor put down his cup, lightly cursing his own perennial

reluctance to get straight to the point when there was a dramatic tale to

be told. 'Well?'

The Other-Doctor lowered his voice to a stage whisper. 'The means

by which to interact with the victim's own history, gaining physical

access to his past!'

The Doctor was amazed. 'Time travel through an individual's timeline?'

'Through a *Time Lord*'s timeline,' reminded the Other-Doctor. 'Some

caprice of the genetic imprimatur that enables any of us to travel

through time. And by stopping off at any point in the victim's past

when they're in close contact with another, older host, by bridging the

synaptic gap -'

'They could move ever further back through time. .'  
breathed the

Doctor. 'But why?'

The Other-Doctor poured himself another cup. 'Why not? It was a

game to them, a diversion, a proving of their own genius. Imagine if

their experiments had proved successful - biological TARDISes, grown

from Time Lord cells. .But there was a side-effect they couldn't have

foretold.'

Abruptly, whatever lighting there was in the chamber dimmed, and

sinister whisperings started up around them.

'There isn't much time,' warned the Doctor. 'Quickly.'

'They perfected the move from carrier to carrier. But on exiting the

body, the life of the initial host simply. .unwound. At the point of entry,

the meddlers effectively picked a stitch in the physical pattern of their

host, left a thread dangling. When they left the body, they tugged on

that thread and the host's entire life unravelled. Imagine it - an innocent

life being made to die a trillion times over through every point in its

history. .The records of time being rewritten with each passing second

as that person's life was truncated.. cut off at the point these electrochemical surfers left the host body.'

'And started again on someone new.'

'Yes.' The whispering was getting louder, the darkness encroaching

on them The two identical Doctors huddled nearer. 'They were trapped

in the subjective past, moving from host to host, killing

indiscriminately. I'm not surprised old Rassilon abandoned them to

their fate. They ended up inside the poor old owner of this ship. He

must have had some kind of seizure while on reconnaissance charting

this sector of space for the time-space maps, way, way back.'

The Doctor thought of the huge figure clutching its head in the

husk of the control room. 'Brain-damaged.. comatose. .'

'They went mad with him,' confirmed the Other-Doctor, as the two

of them were forced into what amounted to little more than a spotlight

in the middle of pitch blackness. Of the tea and the table there was

now no sign.

The Other-Doctor shook himself by the hand. 'Well.. Lovely meeting me, but I really think you'd better stop them now, don't you?

They'll travel back down our timestream to a point before we left

Gallifrey, to run amok there. Who knows what damage they'll do -

they're desperate to be free. .to be *remembered*. Celebrated as pioneers.'

'Pioneers? Hah! Reckless bunglers and murderers!'

The whispering grew louder, swelling into mocking laughter. The

Other-Doctor faded from sight, his face pale.

'Deranged killers!' Even as he yelled out the words, the Doctor

clutched his temples and the blackness closed in around him.

He came to in the gloom of the ancient cartographer's TARDIS, his

mind reeling as he felt the mental dams he had erected beginning to

crumble under the onslaught of the Forgotten. An image of the flower

of remembrance blazed in his head so brightly it threatened to eclipse

all coherent thought.

'Doctor! You're all right!' The voice echoed through to his confused

thoughts. He focused on it, used it to consolidate his senses in the

midst of the assault. It was Sam's voice.

'Hello, Sam,' he mumbled. 'I'm glad you're all right.'

Sam looked at him with a worried frown. 'Just about. Are you all

right?'

The Time Lord leapt to his feet. 'On the contrary! I'm going to be

used as a bridgehead to wreak havoc across all Gallifrey before ceasing

to exist, rewriting about a million histories and wiping out a mighty

chunk of the entire causal nexus that holds the universe together!' He



shuddered, then gaped at his bemused companion through the gloom.

'You know, when you've been about as much as I have, I really hate to

imagine what the universe would've been like without me.'

'What are you talking about, Doctor?' asked Sam, fear and worry

lining her face. 'What's -'

The Doctor's cry of pain cut her off. 'Have to do something! It's

now or never,' he hissed. 'They're through - they're moving back

through my timeline!'

Sibilant whispering laughter echoed around the void as the Forgotten

exalted at the continuation of their journey. Subatomic particles flashed

and jostled and decayed about them as the impulses travelled faster

than inspiration through the encoded DNA patterns of the Doctor's

physical history.

'Psychic surgery,' whispered a voice in his head. It was his own voice.

'Come on, you can do it. I'll help.'

Flashes of memories came to him, a rough chart of the impulses'

progress. They'd easily broached the point in time he'd last regenerated,

pushing past bleary operating tables and bullets in San Francisco. .through Cheetah people, Daleks, Nimons, Kraals.  
'

The Doctor was bewildered at the speed with which they were

moving back, so fast he could barely register what was happening. And

still they were moving through his lives. .ever further back. He tried to

focus himself, to concentrate. Another regeneration was imminent.

'Now!' came his own voice from far away, but it was already too late.

He shuddered as the grey-haired dandified figure was born from the

pain and dismay of the little dark-haired clown, tried and convicted by

the very people he was fighting now to save. Back through the past of

his second incarnation, through Krotons and Ice Warriors, Yeti and

Macra - yes, he could feel them more acutely now -

'Feed them through. .That's right, back, back. .Come on!'

' *Come on*, Doctor,' urged Sam.

The Doctor knew what was coming. He remembered it had

happened in the TARDIS as he'd left Antarctica after his first meeting

with the Cybermen, his body changing from that of an old man,

rejuvenating itself, jewellery slipping from his new fingers, a part of him

dying off so another could be born.

It was there he had to act.

'Step inside,' he whispered quietly as the rushing babbling and

laughter reached a crescendo.

'Got you!'

The Doctor sat bolt upright, making Sam jump. He held his head as

if impersonating the huge figure above them, and for a moment he

wincing as he felt something leave him. The ghost of a possible future

that had given him the help he'd needed to cheat it. He shook his head.

It never paid to analyse paradoxes too closely.

'Come on!' he yelled, then realised Sam was already at the doorway

of the blackened control room.

'*You* come on,' said Sam, challenging him, but there was no disguising the tears of relief in her eyes.

In a moment he was by her side, then pulling her along behind him,

explaining what had been happening to him as he went. He suddenly

seemed to know where he was going, despite the darkness.

'You were held by the defence mechanisms of this old crate,' he

continued, although by this time Sam was finding it difficult to boggle

and run effectively at the same time. 'A kind of temporal stasis field.

We Time Lords were a far more paranoid race back then. Wouldn't get

any nasty tricks like that on the TARDISEs I grew up with.'

'This place is really that old?' marvelled Sam breathlessly.

'Really. The Forgotten externalised their madness on to the rest of

the ship through the telepathic circuits. But now they've made the jump

to me, this whole timestream will be becoming unstable. The owner

died millions of years ago and this TARDIS never came here.' He

skidded to a halt, suddenly reflective and sombre. 'I'm glad that all these

aeons of insanity and darkness will be wiped clean.'

Something seemed to be happening. It was getting lighter, and the

dull humming of the decaying ship was starting to rise in pitch.

'Not long now,' said the Doctor, looking worriedly at Sam.

'Let's not get wiped clean with it, eh?' she answered, and the pair set

off again.

At last they reached the reassuring blue police box exterior of the

Doctor's TARDIS.

'And these. .Forgotten things,' asked Sam, her mind racing to catch

up. 'They're still in your head now?'

'Trapped in a sealed segment of my brain, the tiny part of my mind

that dies when I regenerate. It's like shedding a skin - or for the

Forgotten, it's like being caught inside a cut that's healed over.'

'Can you contain them there? I mean, for ever?'

'I hope so,' said the Doctor, pausing in the TARDIS doorway. 'I

only hope they'll be able to keep themselves entertained.' He grinned.

'I'm planning to be around for quite a little while yet, you know!'

The shades of darkness outside were blurring, shifting.

'This reality is dissolving. Come on, Sam - time we were gone.'

'So the TARDIS will be freed, yeah?' said Sam as she was ushered

inside. 'I mean - it'll never have been here!'

'Precisely,' said the Doctor with a grin.

'So will we remember any of it, then?' asked Sam.

The Doctor's eyes were haunted as the TARDIS began to vibrate in

sympathy with its surroundings.

'Perhaps some things are *best* forgotten,' was his only answer.

And at that instant, the dark carbuncle in space was no more,

leaving the Doctor and Sam free to continue their journeys.

Romans Cutaway

by David A. McIntee

It wasn't the blood, or the dented metal, that struck Ian Chesterton

most, but the sudden silence. Where, in a film, one might have expected

screams and the screech of tyres, there had in reality been only a

strange, hollow smack. Then silence had fallen, giving Ian the

impression that everyone was staring at him. He wasn't aware of his

just-purchased newspaper dropping from his hand, or of his feet hitting

the pavement as he ran to the corner of the street.

The silence was ominous, like the pause taken by a doctor before

imparting bad news. That, more than anything else, told him things

couldn't be good. People in the street parted around him. He seemed to

be moving in slow motion now, but he was still drawing nearer the

dented Ford Anglia. If there was anyone in it, he couldn't see them.

He wasn't really seeing much of anything, apart from the bundled

figure sprawled on the pavement next to the bus stop. The blood that

pooled around her head was almost as black as her hair. Ian tried to

stop where he was. He didn't want to get any nearer, to see that pale

face. Yet somehow he found himself kneeling next to her anyway, arms

tight around her shoulders. He hadn't even got to her in time to say

goodbye.

'Barbara. .' But it shouldn't be Barbara, should it? Wasn't this the



crash mentioned in the newspaper he had just dropped? The girl in that

was Suzy, not Barbara. And then something tore at him, wrenching him

away from her.

There were insects buzzing around him. Ian stirred. He felt sure that

he was lying in a V-shaped ditch. Except it was hard, too hard.. It

wasn't a ditch. It was the point where the floor met the wall. And now

he realised that what he had taken to be insects in flight was actually the

familiar hum of the TARDIS's drives at rest. Relief washed over him.

'Just a nightmare,' he muttered.

Recent events jostled for attention in his mind. He supposed he

shouldn't be too surprised that he'd had such a dream - the TARDIS

had taken quite a tumble, and both he and Barbara had been thrown

against the wall. It was only natural that his subconscious should try to

warn him that she might be hurt and need his help.

He rose unsteadily, bracing himself against the wall. The floor was

tilted at a steep angle, and the central console loomed overhead. Ian

turned, looking for Barbara. She was groaning a few feet away. He

moved towards her, trying not to lose his footing. 'Barbara?' She didn't

answer, and for a horrible moment he feared his nightmare had been a

premonition. But then she opened her eyes.

'Ian?' she replied, blinking. She tried to stand but lost her balance on

the sloping floor. Ian helped her to steady herself. Are you all right?'

She nodded slowly. 'Yes, I think I remember now. . the Ship had

landed, then it started to tilt -'

'The Doctor tried to take off again, but -'

Barbara gasped. 'The Doctor!'

The concern in her voice made Ian turn anxiously. The Doctor was

propped in a delicately balanced chair a few feet away, while a bruised

Vicki held a handkerchief to his forehead. His long silver hair was

tangled, but otherwise he seemed fine. Ian sometimes thought that for

all his apparent frailty, their mysterious pilot had the constitution of an

ox. He was far more than just an old man. Vicki looked up as the two

twentieth-century schoolteachers approached. 'You've come round!' she

said happily.

'More or less,' Ian agreed. 'How's the Doctor?'

'The Doctor is perfectly healthy, thank you very much,' replied the

old man irritably. 'As I told the child here, I merely need to get my

breath back.'

'Definitely his normal self,' Barbara said drily.

'And just whose self do you expect me to be? Hmm? Now, are you

two all right?'

'A few bumps and bruises, but nothing broken,' Ian said.

'Good. Good.' The Doctor's eyes sparkled brightly. 'Then the first

thing we have to do is find out where we are'

Ian frowned. 'Are you sure, Doctor? I mean, wouldn't it be safer to

take off again first?'

'Without knowing where we are?' the Doctor scoffed. 'We might be

missing marvels, Chesterton! Besides, did you never stop to suppose

this might be Earth in your time, hmm? If it is, you might not get the

chance to return again.' He dabbed at his face with a handkerchief. 'No,

the TARDIS is. . I think the TARDIS is quite stable enough now

Besides,' he said, indicating the console hanging overhead, 'that panel

tells us about the local environment, and it is quite readable from here.

Ian knew the battle was lost. The Doctor balanced himself in a

position to read the dials on the panel. Atmosphere. . Gravity. . You

know, dear boy, I do believe that it is Earth out there. The readings

match exactly.'

Ian and Barbara exchanged a glance. Neither dared raise their hopes

only to have them dashed on whatever 'marvels' lay waiting outside.

The TARDIS had brought them to Earth before, in far-flung parts, but

never in their own time. He looked up at the dials himself, but couldn't

quite follow them. 'But do you know exactly where on Earth, Doctor?

Or when?'

'I'm afraid not, Chesterton. We shall simply have to go out and

look.' The Doctor bent to pick up his cane, and reached over to press

the door switch. 'Now, stand back, just in case. There is a possibility

that some rocks may have fallen on us and blocked the entrance.' Ian

sheltered Barbara and Vicki as the three of them backed away. The

doors opened with a tinny hum. Dust and pebbles rolled in as a shaft

of morning sunlight illuminated the interior. It was, Ian thought, quite

reassuring. But the real struggle would be in actually getting out. .

'At least it isn't raining,' Barbara said, lightening the mood.

The Doctor chuckled slightly, clapping her on the shoulder.  
'Lucky

for us, eh? See, it isn't all doom and gloom.' He beckoned Ian over.

'Come on, Chesterfield,' he said briskly, cupping his hands together in a

stirrup. 'Up you go.'

Ian hesitated.

'Well, you're not afraid of heights, are you?'

'No, I -'

The Doctor's eyes glinted, as if reading Ian's mind.' So what exactly

is the difficulty?' He puffed out his chest. 'Think the old boy's not up to

taking your weight? Hmm?'

'Well, no, but -' Ian could see the Doctor wasn't fooled for a moment.

'Perhaps you'd feel more comfortable if Barbara or Vicki were to

help you?'

Ian grimaced. 'All right, Doctor. You win.'

'But of course, my boy, of course!'

The TARDIS was lying tilted at the foot of a narrow ravine, with a few

frail-looking trees clinging to the rocky walls. For a while, Ian was

simply pleased to have made it out of the TARDIS. Then he realised

his problems were only starting. How was he going to get the others

out?

Barbara knew that if anyone could find a way to help them out, it was

Ian. She might not have much faith in the TARDIS's ability to get them

where they wanted to go, but Ian had never failed her yet. But no, she

reminded herself, that was a very selfish way to look at things. It was

truer to say that he had never failed them yet - the Doctor, Susan, Vicki

*or* herself.

Ian's head and shoulders reappeared, framed in the open doorway.

'Well, Chesterton?'

'It all looks pretty peaceful from up here, Doctor. And I think you're

right - we're on Earth. Unless wild strawberries grow anywhere else in

the cosmos.'

'Well done, my boy, well done.'

'But how do the rest of us get out?' Vicki asked. 'Or do we stay here

while Ian feeds us strawberries?'

'I'm not sure. . There's nothing much here.' Ian didn't sound particularly disappointed or frustrated, he was just stating a fact. 'Just

lots of countryside. . Hang on a minute, though, I think I do have an

idea.' He disappeared for a few seconds, then returned. 'All right, stay

back out of the way.'

Barbara ushered Vicki and the Doctor back into the corner. There

was a tremendous rustling and crashing from outside, and then, after a

few minutes, a tall but slim tree trunk crashed down past the console.



Ian had managed to guide it under the panels, so it didn't hit any

switches. Branches jutted out everywhere, providing excellent hand-

and footholds.

'There you go,' Ian called down. 'It should be strong enough to take

your weight.'

Within fifteen minutes they were all standing together outside in front

of the toppled TARDIS.

'Chesterton,' the Doctor blustered. 'Did you think about what you

were doing there? Hmm? If that. . tree had touched any of the controls,

it could have started the Ship's drives, or broken something and

stranded us here .. '

Ian had learned long ago that the Doctor's idea of gratitude was

somewhat limited, to say the least. 'I was being careful, Doctor. Believe

me, I didn't want the Ship to go without me either.'

'No, well, I suppose you didn't at that. . Still, you should have at

least warned me of what you were planning. .'

The real fire had already gone from the Doctor's voice, so Ian decided to accept that with good grace. 'All right, Doctor, I'm sorry.

Next time I'll warn you.'

'Next time indeed,' the Doctor echoed huffily. He put his knuckles

to his mouth thoughtfully. 'I must take some sort of precaution against

this happening again. .'

The TARDIS was propped up by a large rock in the middle of a clump

of bushes. Ian pointed up, to where a chunk had been gouged out of a

ledge some yards above. The Ship must have landed right up there, and

the edge crumbled,' he said.

Barbara shivered in spite of herself. 'It's just as well it wasn't much

higher. We could have been killed.'

'Yes. . You'd think the Doctor would have some sort of gadget in

the Ship to keep the inside steady even if the outside gets knocked

around a bit.'

'I know what you mean. I feel like I've been over Niagara Falls in a

barrel.'

Ian suppressed a smile at the image of Coal Hill's most dreaded

history teacher white-water rafting in a barrel. 'The Doctor certainly has

a knack for picking out inconvenient landing sites, doesn't he?'

'It's not really his fault, Ian. It's the Ship that picks where to land.

'Oh. .' He could feel a whimsical mood coming on. 'Perhaps we

should make it offerings to find less hostile destinations. Vicki could lay

out platters of tropical fruits and wine to appease the spirit of the

TARDIS.'

Barbara laughed. 'I can't see the Doctor in a grass skirt and flower

garlands, though, can you?'

'I bet if we asked him, he'd say he's tried it.' They laughed together,

and that always felt good to Ian. 'I suppose we ought to try to

straighten the Ship out.'

Barbara's smile remained even though her laughter faded with the

thought of the job at hand. 'We'll need some kind of leverage.'

'One of these trees the Ship broke on its fall might do the trick. It'll

be pliable enough.'

'Eh? What?' the Doctor asked, returning with Vicki in tow.

'I was just saying that I think we might be able to right the Ship,

Doctor. Between the two of us, one of these trees should be enough to

lever it up.'

'I see, I see. . Very well, Chesterton, it's possible, certainly. A capital

idea, my boy. Now, while you are doing that, Vicki and I will go to see

if we can find help.'

'Right,' Ian said with a nod. The Doctor didn't look strong enough

to help move the Ship, and, wherever they were in whatever time, an

old man and a girl would be less threatening strangers than two

dishevelled adults, who could easily be taken for robbers.

'Very well. That looks like a farm road at the top of this rise. We'll

walk along for an hour or so, and if we don't see any houses or villages,

we'll come back.'

'Good enough, Doctor.'

It was single-storey and open-plan, with wings at each end of a larger

building and a bubbling fountain in front. Slim pillars lined the walls

and delicately painted statues were dotted around in shaded positions.

The roof was covered in terracotta tiles, the colour of a summer sunset.

Beyond, rows of vegetables seemed to be flourishing in the sunny

conditions.

'There you are, child,' the Doctor said, sounding proud of himself.

'Somewhere peaceful and restful, just like I said it would be,'

Vicki's schooling in ancient Earth history hadn't gone that much

further back than the Victorian era, but she still felt a twinge of

recognition at the sight of the building ahead. 'It looks like some kind

of Roman villa.'

'But of course!' the Doctor agreed. 'That's exactly what it is. We

must have landed in Roman times. And in Italy too, judging by the

flora. We're probably less than a week's walk away from Rome itself.'

'I've really travelled in time!' said Vicki excitedly. 'But poor Ian and

Barbara. They'll be so disappointed not to be home.'

'Disappointed?' the Doctor harrumphed, blustering. 'My dear, how

many of their kind get to visit their own history like this, hmm? They

should be delighted, delighted, yes. .'

He led her in through the pillars to the main room. Couches and

bowls of fruit were dotted about, and the walls and floor were

decorated with colourful frescoes and mosaics.

Vicki suddenly stopped, noticing the dark spots on the smooth

floor. A few feet beyond, there was a similar smudge at about chest

height on one of the delicate pillars that supported the silken curtains.

'Doctor,' she squeaked, look.'

The Doctor peered sharply at the stains.

'It *is* blood, isn't it?' she said.

Ian heaved on the slim tree trunk once again with all his strength, but

still it did no good. The afternoon sun was getting the better of him, so

he wiped the sweat from his brow and went to sit beside Barbara. Even

though he had taken off his jacket, a collar and tie were hardly the right

attire for this sort of work. 'Let's hope the Doctor and Vicki have had

more luck than us!' he sighed.

Barbara agreed. Her hair was ruffled, but she still looked quite cool

and composed. 'They should be back, soon.'

'If they haven't found help, we'll just have to slide back down into

the Ship and risk taking off for somewhere else.'

'Yes, I -' Barbara broke off. 'Did you hear something?'

Ian listened carefully. There was a grumbling and a faint scratching

coming from some nearby rocks.

The Doctor straightened up from his examination of the stain. 'Yes, my

child, it certainly would seem to be blood.' They both looked about,

wondering where the villa's inhabitants were, then the Doctor

approached the curtain warily. 'It seems to lead this way.'

'Oh, Doctor, do be careful,' Vicki urged.

'I don't think there's anything here to fear,' he said reassuringly. 'But

remember I have this, just in case,' he added, brandishing his cane. He



tugged the curtain aside and stepped through. Vicki followed, but

stopped with a gasp when she saw the source of the blood. A middle-

aged man, stocky and weather-beaten, dressed in simple clothes, was

propped up on a couch, semi-conscious. He had obviously tried to

bandage the savage wounds that crossed his torso, but the bandages

had outlasted their usefulness. Even from here, Vicki almost gagged at

the stench.

The Doctor lowered his cane and examined the wounded man.

'These are claw marks,' he murmured. 'Some sort of large animal.. '

'Lion,' came the weak reply. 'Who are you?'

'I am called the Doctor. My niece and I are travellers,' the Doctor

said hurriedly. We stopped at your villa to ask for water, but when we

saw the blood, we came to help.'

'I am Lucius. I watch over this villa.' The effort of speaking made

the man wince. 'You say you are a master of the physic?' He half

smiled. 'Too late. My sense of smell has not deserted me. Nor yours,

child, I see.'

'What happened?' the Doctor asked with that gentle cheer he could

switch on at will.

'I heard movement early the day before yesterday. At first I thought

perhaps robbers. . but it was a lion. It must have escaped from the

arena. . I had a spear, I spiked him, but still he cut me down. . 'The man

coughed and his eyes glazed over momentarily. 'Water. . please. . '

The Doctor pointed back through the curtains. 'I saw some goblets

in there, child,' he said softly. 'Beside the little spring.'

Vicki nodded and went back into the main room. There were indeed

various golden goblets scattered around. She picked up the nearest and

filled it with spring water.

When she returned, Lucius took it with some difficulty, but relaxed

a little after a few sips. 'Thank you.' He grabbed the Doctor's shoulder.

'My friend, I know I will not see this night fall. I also know I have no

right to ask this of you, but I must do so anyway.'

'Please do'

'My master is campaigning in Gaul for some time yet. Please. . Look

after the villa. Make sure that the vegetables in the garden are watered,

and that no robbers ransack the place. I will understand if you refuse,

but it is my duty to take care of his home - to the last. 'His voice was

filled with the hope that they'd understand.

Vicki was surprised that he would ask such a thing so soon after

meeting them. 'But why would you trust us with such an important

task? You don't know *we're* not robbers'

Lucius forced a smile and indicated the goblet she held. 'If you were

robbers, you would have taken the gold without letting me know you

were here, not helped me.' He looked at the Doctor. And you.  
. There

is something in your gaze that is -' And then he was gone.

Vicki shuddered and turned away. 'Never seen anyone die before,'

she muttered.

'It's a sad business, my child, a sad business. .'Â The Doctor closed

Lucius's eyes gently, then his own widened.

Vicki started to ask him what was wrong but then suddenly realised.

'But if that lion is still in the area. . We have to warn Ian and Barbara!'

The Doctor shook his head. 'One of us would have to stay here, to

keep our promise. And it would be most unsafe for the other to go out

alone.'

'But we can't just let Ian and Barbara stay out there in danger!' Vicki

looked at him wide-eyed. Surely he couldn't be that selfish?

'Of course not, child!' the Doctor snapped. 'I said "we" cannot go. I

will go myself. You stay here. Do as he said, look after the villa.'

'But what will you do if you run into this lion?'

The Doctor waved his cane angrily, but his words were mild. 'Take

shelter and leave it alone until it goes.

Vicki frowned. A ravenous lion was hardly likely to appreciate

discretion. 'Until it goes? But it would eat you up!'

The Doctor gave an irritable sigh, but his expression suddenly

softened and he patted her on the shoulder. 'Oh, don't you believe that,

my dear. Lions are very misunderstood creatures, you know. It's the

females who hunt and attack. Male lions are actually rather lazy. They'd

much rather sneak around and steal the food away from another animal

than chase it down themselves.'

'But Lucius. . it attacked him'

The Doctor nodded. 'Yes. . but he had a spear, remember. I imagine

that he thought giving it a little prod -' the Doctor demonstrated with

his cane - 'would drive it off before it could attack him. But all that did

was provoke the animal to defend itself.' The Doctor smiled happily at

his deduction. 'Yes, yes. . I'm sure I shall be perfectly safe - and so will

Ian and Barbara, if I can persuade them not to try to "defend themselves" as poor Lucius here did, hmm?'

'There it is again!' whispered Barbara, looking at Ian intently.

Ian nodded slowly. 'Sounds like some sort of animal.. '

Then, without warning, an enormous lion leapt up on the rocks. The

fierceness of its roar and the fact that its paws were caked in dried

blood made Ian doubt it was here to ask them for help in plucking out

a thorn.

He glanced at Barbara, who was rooted to the spot. He was a science teacher, not a biology one. . What the hell would a lion do

next? Should he and Barbara move away, or would that provoke it? It

was still a cat of sorts though, and in his experience cats were less likely

to attack animals that remained motionless.

'That's right, Barbara. Nice and still.'

Despite his own advice, it took a lot of will-power not to bolt up the

ridge. Then, to his mounting horror, the lion padded slowly around to

Barbara.

The dream. Her head, covered in blood. Never even getting to say

goodbye.

The lion was looking at Barbara, who was standing stock still, her

eyes tightly shut now, barely daring to breathe. Ian still knew

intellectually that moving was likely to be a bad idea, but what else *could*

he do? Slowly, painfully slowly, he picked up a large rock and hefted it,

testing its weight.

The lion growled, and Barbara whimpered softly.

Ian wasn't going to let the lion get any closer. With a skill honed

annually in the pupils versus teachers cricket match, he aimed and

threw. As rock cracked off skull, the beast turned to face its attacker.

Barbara fell back and scrambled away as the lion's drooling jaws passed

over her. Ian snatched up his jacket and hurled it across the lion's head

before it could pounce. The lion rolled over, tearing the jacket free

with its front paws, as Ian took a long leap for the TARDIS. He saw

with relief that Barbara had taken shelter now under some fallen rocks,

but he had no idea how he was supposed to save himself. The TARDIS

was locked; where else could he go? How far would the lion climb after

him?

The slaving creature lunged forward, slashing at Ian's thighs but

succeeding only in clawing the air. Ian rolled, hurling another small rock



at the lion's face.

The lion jumped up on to the TARDIS and Ian took a running leap

at the ledge in the rock above. If he could just get up as far as the point

where the TARDIS had first landed before the lion could reach him..

The lion sprang for a tree in Ian's path. The tree momentarily blocked Ian's way, but then its pliability caused it to swing back,

throwing the lion to the ground below. Ian took advantage of the

moment, scrambling upwards to the ledge. There was a large boulder

there, together with plenty of broken branches. He slipped, felt his

palms stinging as they hit the rock, felt the blood pounding through his

veins. The lion roared more loudly than ever. That's right, he thought.

Keep with me, forget all about Barbara, keep with me. He winced as he

cracked his knee against the rock face, but he was nearly there, nearly

there...

At last he reached the ledge. 'Hey, Lenny!' he yelled. The lion looked

up and roared again, more furious than before. It settled back on its

haunches for a moment, then sprang towards him, claws scrabbling on

rock.

Ian moved round behind the boulder. 'A little closer. . come on,

boy. .' And the boulder proved to be far more co-operative than the

TARDIS. A sharp pressure on a good branch set the huge rock

toppling right through the gap in the broken ledge.

There was a hideous wet crunch, as the falling boulder met the

climbing lion's forehead, then silence. Ian looked over the edge. The

lion's paws were twitching feebly. Bull's-eye. From the mess below,

these must be death throes.

'Barbara! Chesterton! Are you two all right?' It was the Doctor,

calling from the roadside further along the ridge. Barbara was climbing

out from behind her pile of rocks, hugging herself in distress.  
Ian felt

suddenly shaky and fell back against the ledge. He'd just  
slaughtered a

wild animal. He'd had no choice, he told himself, to save his  
own life,

to save Barbara's. . Somehow, this act of destruction seemed  
more real

than the killing of something evil like the Daleks, or the  
Slyther. And

the look on Barbara's face. . Was she angry with him? Would  
it change

how she saw him?

He wanted to call down to the Doctor that he was fine, but  
no

words would come.

It wasn't the blood, or the dented metal, that struck Ian  
Chesterton

most, but the sudden silence. Where, in a film, one might  
have expected

screams and the screech of tyres, there had in reality been  
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imparting bad news. That, more than anything else, told him things

couldn't be good. People in the street parted around him. He seemed to

be moving in slow motion now, but he was still drawing nearer the

dented Ford Anglia. If there was anyone in it, he couldn't see them..

Ian woke with a gasp, the scent of blood in his nostrils and the sound

of a car horn still ringing in his ears. 'Barbara. .' For a moment he was

disoriented, unsure whether he was still in the street of his nightmare or

the fallen TARDIS.. But the gentle sound of crickets outside quickly

reminded him, and he opened his eyes on to the moonlit interior of the

villa.

Why had he had the same dream again? There had been no tumble

to spark it off this time. He rose, shivering. He was deluding himself if

he believed that the dream was merely a reaction to disaster. It went

deeper than that. It was about how he felt. How he had felt in the

dream and how he had felt back there at the ravine, when that lion had

threatened Barbara. When the real version of that newspaper from his

dream had landed on his doormat, he had felt the world collapse

around him because he had loved Suzy. Her face staring out from

under the headline about a car crash had nearly - well.. it hadn't killed

him, but he'd almost rather it had.

So why feel the same about a threat to Barbara?

'Are you all right, Ian?' Barbara asked from her room.

'Yes. . Just a nightmare. Go back to sleep.'

'That'll be easy enough. .' She closed her eyes again and lay back on

the couch. 'It's very peaceful here.'

Ian couldn't disagree there. 'Well, the Doctor's got everything sorted

out. It seems we can occupy this villa for a few weeks, as sort of

unofficial caretakers.'

'Poor old Lucius,' Barbara murmured.

'Poor old lion,' ventured Ian, holding his breath for her reply.

'You did what you had to,' said Barbara, her voice still drowsy with

sleep. 'Don't think about it now. We can stay here for a while. Nice

Mediterranean holiday. .'

'That's what I thought.' In spite of himself, he stepped into the

room.

'Mm-hmm.'

Ian sat gently on the edge of the couch, so as not to disturb her. 'I

suppose the Doctor has actually done what he wanted this time, found

a restful place for us all.'

'Mm-hmm.'

'The rest will do you good. I was pretty worried after the crash' He

hesitated; he hadn't actually meant 'crash', but. . Well, it was as good a

word as any.

'Mm-hmm.'

'It's probably a good thing you're dozing off. I doubt you'd react too

well to my being overly concerned for you when you're perfectly

capable of looking after yourself.'

'Mm-hmm.'

'Makes it very difficult to say what I think sometimes.'

'Mm-hmm.'

'Can't even say, "I love . . ."'

As he said the words, he realised suddenly how obvious it was - that

*that* was what his nightmare had been telling him. He wondered if he

would have had the nerve to say that to her face when she was awake.

She was obviously asleep now. He didn't want to wake her, so he

settled for kissing her lightly on the cheek, and returning to his own

room.

Barbara smiled without opening her eyes. She wondered when she

would have the courage to admit to the same feeling for him.

Return of the Spiders

by Gareth Roberts

The Fordyces were entertaining guests.

This was unusual. On the Riverdale Estate in High Wycombe, not a

great deal of entertaining took place. Most people in the various culs-

de-sac and crescents preferred to hide in their townhouses watching

television of a night, so it was with some surprise that they received

invitations to a buffet supper at No. 9 Honeysuckle Close. None of

those who had been invited knew the Fordyces beyond the occasional



wave or exchanged pleasantries about the weather or parking. But it was,

they supposed, nice to be asked; and besides, there was always, even in

this reserved and well-fed enclave, a sneaky desire to see inside

someone else's house.

So it was that Jean Morris and her husband, Frank, entered the

smart, dust-free hallway of the Fordyces' home one Saturday evening in

early September.

Mrs Fordyce - Jean Morris couldn't recall the woman's first name, if

she had ever known it - stepped forward and said, 'Hello, let me take

your coats.'

Jean and Frank handed them over, but Jean was puzzled. It was a

perfectly ordinary phrase, but was there an icy coldness in the delivery?

'Come into our parlour,' said Mrs Fordyce, waving them into the

front room.

'She seems a cold fish,' Jean whispered to her husband.

'The whole house is very draughty,' he replied. 'They must have

skimped on their loft insulation.'

In the living room they found a scene of utter normality. A handful

of couples stood talking quietly around a table upon which a buffet was

presumably laid out beneath a checkered tablecloth.

Mr Fordyce, a tall and rather gaunt fellow, came forward.

'Ah, you

must be the Morriszes,' he said. 'We were wondering where you'd got to.'

Jean bristled. 'The invite said half-seven for eight.'

'Indeed, indeed. Well, now you're here you'd better have a drink.' He

handed them two glasses filled to the brim with red wine.

'You'll enjoy

this, I'm sure.'

Jean took a sip and thanked him. When he had moved away she

whispered to her husband, 'What a creepy pair. Made for each other,

I'd say.'

'Yes, they've both got that peculiar way of holding themselves,' said

Frank. 'Round-shouldered. As if they'd been carrying something heavy

on their backs.'

Before they could converse further, Mrs Fordyce entered and said

brightly, 'Well, hello, everyone. We're all here, so I suppose it's time to

tuck in.' As she spoke she closed the door that led out to the hall and

turned the key in its lock. At the same time Mr Fordyce took up

position in front of the only other exit, to the kitchen.

There was a general murmur of confusion from their guests.

'What are they up to?' asked Frank.

'Oh dear,' said Jean. 'I hope it's not going to be one of those occasions where everyone throws their car keys on to the coffee table.'

The Fordyces closed in on their guests. 'Yes,' they said as one, 'time

for our feast to begin.' Their voices took on a strange unearthly quality

and their eyes began to glow a hypnotic blue. 'We have waited so long

in the wastes of the spatio-temporal vortex.'

Patrick Morris frowned. 'Now, look here, you two,' he said. 'It's

another month to Hallowe'en, and you're giving me the willies, so

knock it off.'

Mrs Fordyce snarled. 'Pathetic humans. You were fools to come to

our buffet!'

Jean was getting angry. 'I don't think it's very clever when grown

people start acting the goat like this.' She gestured to the table. 'Now,

let's behave like adults and get on with the buffet.'

She leapt back as the tablecloth twitched. The corner was pushed up

and a slender hairy leg poked out. 'Cease your prattling,' said the owner

of the leg. ' *You* are the buffet. And it is time for us to feast.'

Jean screamed as the tablecloth was thrown off to reveal two gigantic hairy spiders the size of cats. She cowered with the other

humans as the spiders scuttled towards them, their hungry jaws

snapping.

A couple of nights later something possibly even more unusual

occurred on the Riverdale Estate. There was a fearsome sound of

grinding machinery and a blue police box faded up from transparency.

Two very odd-looking people, a man and a young woman, and an even

odder-looking dog emerged from inside.

Romana, the odd-looking woman, was wondering where the

Randomiser, a device fitted to the TARDIS controls by the Doctor, the

odd-looking man, had brought them this time.

'High Wycombe,' the Doctor pronounced gravely.

Romana sniffed. 'High Wycombe.'

K9, their odd-looking robotic dog, piped up, 'High Wycombe.

Planet Earth. Level four suburban conurbation, founded *circa* Terran

year 1760 -'

The Doctor cut him short. 'Spare us the lecture, K9.' He stuck his

hands deep in the pockets of his long frock coat and strode towards the

houses, looking rather downcast. He let out a sigh and gestured to the

ranks of identical houses. 'Just look at those.'

Romana shrugged. 'Simple human dwelling units.' She was surprised.

The Doctor normally had an almost tiring enthusiasm for every far-

flung shore the TARDIS washed up on. 'I thought Earth was your

favourite planet,' she said.

'Oh, it is, it is,' said the Doctor. 'And humans are quite my favourite

species. But I've never been at all keen on suburbs, wherever in the

universe they are.' He pointed a thumb back at the TARDIS. 'I think

perhaps we should pull the handle on that old fruit machine again.'

Romana disagreed. 'You don't know what's going on behind the net

curtains, Doctor:

He scoffed. 'That's what people always say. The true tragedy of

suburbia, Romana, is that *nothing* is going on behind the net curtains.'

He started to walk back to the TARDIS. 'Come on, Romana. And you,

K9.'But Romana stood her ground. 'I'm sure we could find some sort of

drama or intrigue if we only stopped and looked.'

'Pointless,' said the Doctor. 'Come on.'

'I bet you we could,' said Romana. She knew the Doctor could never

resist a challenge.

The Doctor swung about. 'Bet?' He narrowed his eyes, intrigued.

'How much?'

Romana considered. 'Oh, I don't know. .Shall we say five Gallifreyan

pounds?' She put out her hand.

The Doctor shook it firmly. 'Done. You'll regret this, Romana.' He

smiled. 'I'll be able to get a new pair of socks, instead of relying on K9

to darn the old ones all the time.' He waved to the front doors directly

opposite. 'You'd better get going. Go on, ring on a few bells. I'm telling

you now, you won't find anything. High Wycombe is the last place on

Earth, or should I say in the universe, where anything unusual is ever

going to happen.'

Suddenly there was a hideous, unearthly gurgling noise. It took

Romana a moment to locate its source. She realised it was coming from

the grille-covered drainage system that ran along the gutter at their feet.

'What's that?'

'Shoddy plumbing,' said the Doctor authoritatively, although he did

look a little perturbed at the ferocity of the thrashing, gurgling noise.

Romana knelt and peered through the nearest grating into subterranean darkness. As the awful noise faded away, she thought she

glimpsed, just for a split second, some sort of movement - a spindly,



hairy shape scuttling away as if it feared discovery. She shuddered.

'There's something moving down there.'

'A rat, I should think,' said the Doctor.

Romana beckoned to K9. 'What do your sensors make of it, K9?'

K9 trundled forward and extended his eye-probe towards the drain

covering. His ear sensors whirred and clicked like miniature radar

dishes. 'Animal life detected, Mistress,' he reported.

'There you are, what did I say?' said the Doctor.

K9 went on. 'Exact nature of animal conflicts with my - er. .'

Suddenly K9's red eyescreen began to flash bright blue. He backed

away from the drain as if stung and began to babble.

'Sensors detect

animal life inimical to functioning.'

Romana hurried over. 'What is it, K9? What animal life?'

'Take no notice of him,' said the Doctor. 'He's just having a funny

five minutes.'

Romana was concerned to see that K9 actually seemed to be shaking

with fright. 'What's the matter, K9?'

'Functioning endangered.' K9's head drooped and all his lights went

out. 'Withdrawing personality matrix interface. .' His voice slurred.

The Doctor knelt to examine him. 'Come on, K9, don't be a mimsy

hen.' He blew in K9's ears. 'Dead to the world. Typical. It'll be fluff in

his circuits again.'

Romana shivered. 'Whatever that thing down there was it frightened

him half to death.'

'Don't be silly,' said the Doctor, standing up. 'I'll tell you one thing

for sure, Romana, the most dangerous animal you'll find in High

Wycombe is a hedgehog.'

Their conversation was interrupted again, but this time by a very

different - and much more prosaic - noise. A motorbike was making its

way along the crescent of houses and seated upon it was a helmeted

figure who wore a red and white striped apron. Behind him, strapped to

the seat, was a tower of about twenty square cardboard boxes. The bike

drew to a spluttering halt outside a particular house, and the driver

clambered off, removing his helmet to reveal the acned face of a boy in

his late teens.

'A native,' said the Doctor. 'Why don't you ask him about marauding

animal life? Perhaps you'll listen to him.'

Romana approached the boy. He regarded her very strangely, almost

as if he was frightened. Romana had noticed that she tended to

occasion this response in human males, so she smiled to put him at his

ease, but this only seemed to make him shakier. 'Hello,' she said. 'Have

you noticed any unusual animal life in this area?'

The boy frowned. 'Eh? Sorry?'

The Doctor came up behind Romana. 'Forgive my assistant, she's

not familiar with the ways of your planet.'

'Er, right,' said the boy.

'What we want to know is whether you've noticed anything odd in

these parts of late?'

'I don't think so,' said the boy.

'Hah! There you are,' said the Doctor, putting out his hand to

Romana. 'Five pounds, please. I'll accept a cheque.'

'Wait a moment,' said Romana. She addressed the boy.

'What do you

mean, you don't think so?'

The boy shrugged. 'Well, I've not seen anything myself, but they say

there *are* some strange goings-on round here.'

'What kind of goings-on?'

'Well, a couple of weeks ago - I read it in the free paper - everyone

on this estate woke up in the middle of the night, at exactly the same

moment. They all said they'd had a nightmare, but none of 'em could

remember what it was about.'

'Mass hysteria,' said the Doctor. 'It proves nothing.'

'But then,' the boy continued, 'people said they'd heard strange

noises.'

Romana's ears pricked up. 'Do you mean a sort of thrashing and

gurgling? Coming out of the drains?'

'That's right. And ever since, nobody at my place has wanted to take

orders from round 'ere.' He indicated the nearest door. 'And 'specially

not from them.'

The Doctor leaned forward. Romana realised that, despite himself,

he was becoming interested. 'What exactly do you deliver?'

The boy gestured to the boxes on the back of his bike.

'Pizzas.'

Romana whispered to the Doctor, 'What are pizzas?'

'They're a sort of glorified Welsh rarebit.'

'What's Welsh rarebit?'

'It's a sort of glorified cheese on toast.' The Doctor peered at the

boxes. 'And whoever they are, they like it.'

'That's just it, sir,' said the boy. 'Every night for two weeks, they've

phoned through with the same order. For the special meat-deal meal,

four times over.'

'What's a meat-deal meal?' asked Romana.

'A whopper-sized eighteen-inch meat-deal pizza - that's with ham,

pepperoni, bacon and beef - with chicken wings, coleslaw and

complimentary bottle of diet cola,' explained the boy. 'Four times over,

every night.' He looked around and shuddered. 'But that's not the

weirdest part. When you come back each night, they've done this.' He

led them to a dustbin at the side of the front door and flung the lid up.

'Good grief!' exclaimed Romana. For what lay inside the bin was a

quite alarming sight. The remnants of cardboard boxes that had been

viciously torn apart and were covered in a sticky green substance.

Scattered among the mess were chicken bones and some plastic

containers.

'They always leave the coleslaw,' said the boy.

The Doctor took an extendible slender metal probe from one of his

capacious pockets and used it to lift up a piece of cardboard. He

pointed out a set of marks. 'Teeth,' he said. 'And not human teeth

either.' He probed the green matter. 'This has the viscosity of drool, but

a creature that produces this much is quite uncommon on this planet.'

'Five pounds to me, I think,' said Romana.

The Doctor let the cardboard fall and shut the dustbin lid. He

turned to the delivery boy. 'I tell you what. We'll do this delivery for

you. You get home and put your feet up.' He started to unpack the

pizza boxes and pass them to Romana.

'I've got to get the money,' said the boy.

The Doctor waved a hand airily and produced a drawstring bag.

'Take this. Spend it wisely. Now off you go.' He shook the boy's hand.

'And thank you very much for coming along with all that useful information.'

The boy opened the bag and his eyes boggled. 'Is this *gold*?'

'Yes,' said the Doctor. 'Now run along and leave this to the experts.'

The boy climbed back on to his bike and zoomed away. The Doctor

smiled after his retreating form, then turned to the front door and

coughed. 'Now, we'd better take things very carefully, Romana.'

'Are you sure this is wise?' she asked.

The Doctor rang the doorbell, loudly, three times.

Somewhere, not very far away, a fearsome alien intelligence was roused

from its slumber. It was time to be fed, it knew - but something else

had woken it. An intimation, a dread foreboding. Its large, hairy body

shuffled uneasily. It sensed an enemy.



Romana steeled herself as the door opened. But instead of the

carnivorous alien monster she had expected, she saw a very ordinary-

looking man in his early forties with greying temples and a kindly

expression. 'Hello,' he said.

'Hello,' said the Doctor, adopting a local accent. He thrust the boxes

forward. 'Four meat-deal meals, guv'nor. Plenty to get through there.

You 'avin' a party?'

The man's expression changed instantly to one of suspicion, mixed,

Romana noted, almost with fear. 'No,' he said stiffly. It was almost as if

he was receiving the words he spoke from an ear-piece. 'Not tonight.

We are not having a party.'

'Ere, guv'nor,' asked the Doctor. 'You look a bit peaky. You all right?'

'Yes,' the man replied stiffly. 'I am perfectly all right.' He took the

pizza boxes from the Doctor in a rigid, marionette-like way and handed

him a fifty-pound note. 'Perfectly all right. Here is your payment. Keep

the change.' He slammed the door in their faces.

'Did you notice the delay in his replies?' asked Romana. 'Do you

think he could have had some kind of mental implant?'

The Doctor considered her suggestion. 'It's possible. Or perhaps

he's under some form of hypnotic control.' He drew himself up to his

full height. 'I think there's something very fishy going on here,

Romana.'

'Or meaty. So what are we going to do about it?'

He pointed over his shoulder. 'First off, you go round the back into

the garden and watch what happens.'

'Watch what happens when?' asked Romana.

The Doctor rummaged in his pocket and produced his sonic screwdriver. 'I'm going in through the downstairs toilet window.'

Romana frowned. 'Are you sure that's wise?'

The Doctor shrugged. 'Well, I could try the kitchen, I suppose.'

'I didn't mean that,' said Romana. 'Shouldn't we try to work out

what we're up against before we confront it?'

'That'd take all the fun out of things,' said the Doctor. 'I like surprises. Now off you pop.'

Romana sighed. 'Heaven knows what I'm supposed to do if anything

goes wrong.'

'You're a bright girl, you'll think of something,' said the Doctor. He

started to fiddle with the settings on his screwdriver.

Romana realised she wasn't going to get anywhere, so she set off

along the paved path that led round the corner of the house and to the

back garden.

The evil intelligence stirred. It saw through the eyes of the male host as

he gave payment for the nutrients. The delivery human was not the

same as usual. It wore strange adornments and its large eyes stared

penetratingly.

The evil intelligence communicated with its minions in its clear,

cold, cruel voice. 'This human is not of the usual kind.'

A telepathic reply came back, clear as a bell. 'I sensed this also, O

Queen,' it said. 'Could this be the enemy we detected?'

'We must wait and watch,' said the Queen. 'Be vigilant. The Great

Web must be protected.'

The Doctor slipped through the toilet window and landed softly on the

carpeted floor. He closed the window, pocketed the sonic screwdriver

and looked around. At first everything appeared to be in its place. Then

he noticed something very strange. The bath next to the toilet was filled

with a shifting wispy substance. Curious, the Doctor poked with a

finger and discovered it was tougher than he'd expected. 'And definitely

not native to this planet,' he told himself.

He pressed harder and touched something soft and cold as stone.

Carefully he broke apart the spongy coating - and recoiled in alarm

when he saw a human face looking up at him. He felt for life signs and

was pleased to detect a very faint pulse in the neck. He leaned close to

the supine figure, brushed aside some more of the wispy coating from

her face, and whispered, 'Are you all right, my dear?'

The figure's teeth chattered. 'Help me. .'

'Yes, yes, I'll have you out of there in a jiffy. But first, tell me, who

did this to you?'

The woman's eyes clouded with fear. ' *They* did.. '

'Who's they?' asked the Doctor.

'The Fordyces,' the woman went on.

'The Fordyces?' said the Doctor. 'Very odd name for an alien race.'

The woman went on, 'I hadn't seen hide nor hair of them for a

couple of weeks. Then, out of the blue, last week she sent invites for a

buffet,' she said. 'Said she wanted to introduce me to some new friends.'

She started to quake in fear. 'Then *they* appeared.. '

'Yes, yes, but who are they, mm?'

The poor woman was now moaning in terror and the Doctor

realised he wasn't going to get any sense out of her.

Effortlessly putting

her into a light hypnotic trance, he replaced the wispy strands over her

face and took a peek through the door into the hall. The hall was in

darkness, but light spilled out from the living room opposite.

Taking

care to keep as quiet as possible, the Doctor broke from cover and

crept across.

What he saw in the living room filled him with foreboding.

The man

who had been at the front door was standing with a woman of about

the same age, presumably his wife, in the centre of the room. They

were clutching each other and looked terrified. Before them  
on a rug

were the pizza boxes.

The woman - Mrs Fordyce, the Doctor guessed - spoke.  
'Please,' she

said, wringing her hands. 'Haven't we done enough? You  
said you were

going to go, to leave us alone.'

She seemed to be pleading with thin air, but then a voice  
replied.

The Doctor seemed to hear it more with his mind than with  
his ears. It

was thick with malign intent and had a gurgling, rasping  
quality. 'You

are Two-Legs,' it said smugly. 'Two-Legs must not question  
the actions

of their masters.'

The Doctor racked his brains. He was certain he had heard  
that

voice, or something like it, before. But his memory was  
crammed with

the adventures of the past seven hundred plus years, and it  
was often

difficult for him to recall details of the strange alien species  
he had

encountered. He had always meant to sit down with K9 one day and

compile a book of monsters and mechanical creatures as an *aide-*

*memoire.*

The woman sank to her knees. 'But please. You promised.'

'Be silent. Now it is time for the feast. You will remain still as we

eat.' There was a pause and then the voice said, 'Turn your backs.'

Mr Fordyce whispered to his wife, 'We'd better do as it says.'

The two terrified humans turned around, so that their backs were

facing the pizza boxes. The evil voice spoke again. 'Two-Legs will

remain still,' it warned, 'or we will feast again on living meat.'

A ghostly blue glow began to form at the base of the two humans'

backs and two indistinct shapes began to appear there.

The Doctor was more convinced than ever that he had met this

particular menace before. He mumbled to himself, 'Well it's not the



Daleks - I'd know them straight off. The Cybermen wouldn't have the

imagination for something like this, and it's far too subtle for the

Zygons. .'

The blue glow grew stronger, and the shapes within took on scuttling, hairy form. 'Let us prepare for the feast,' they said.

'Got it!' said the Doctor. 'The giant spiders of Metebelis 3!' He

recalled their last encounter. 'I thought I'd polished them off. Come to

think of it, they very nearly polished me off. This is going to be more

difficult than I imagined.' He peeked around the door again and gulped

as the two giant spiders sprang from the backs of their helpless hosts

and, with frightening speed, launched themselves at the pizzas. They

cooed and smacked their jaws as they tore through the boxes and

wolfed down great mouthfuls of the spongy meaty cheesy substance

within.

The Doctor withdrew to consider his options.

Romana was in the back garden, as ordered, and had seen the

materialisation of the spiders through a chink in the living-room

curtains. She stared, rapt with terror, as the evil arachnids feasted.

'Creatures like that shouldn't exist in the Earth's ecosphere,' she

mused aloud.

Something nudged the back of her leg and she jumped. For a

fleeting second she feared she might have to fend off an attack from

one of the voracious spiders, but it was only K9, who looked in better

spirits than before.

'Mistress,' he said.

'K9, you nearly made me jump out of my skin!'

He whirred and clicked, confused. 'Negative, Mistress. Your physical

envelope is secure.'

'Are you all right now?' Romana asked her metal pet.

'Affirmative. I have reprogrammed my fear circuits.' He nodded to

the window. 'Suggest you divert your attentions to the gigantized

arachnids inside this dwelling.'

'What do you know about them, K9?' asked Romana.

'My data banks indicate that these creatures originate on the planet

Metebelis 3 in the Acteon Group,' he replied. 'Their bodies and brains

were mutated by prolonged exposure to particles of fluon radiation.'

Romana gulped. 'Fluon? I thought the Time Lords had destroyed all

sources of that stuff. It's incredibly dangerous in the hands of lesser

races.'

'So it is,' said a voice at her shoulder.

Romana leapt up again. 'I wish people would stop doing that!' she

told the Doctor.

He patted her on the shoulder. 'Hello, Little Miss Muffet. You shouldn't be so jumpy.'

Romana sighed. 'Is it any wonder, the life we lead?'

The Doctor ignored her. 'Yes, fluon crystals have enormous power.

There was a large pocket of them in the mountains of Metebelis, and

over a couple of centuries the spiders that landed there aboard an Earth

colony ship grew to enormous size under their influence.'

'You seem to know an awful lot about them,' mused Romana.

The Doctor rubbed his chin. 'Well, I know an awful lot about an

awful lot of things. I thought these particular giant spiders were gone

for good, but somehow they've opened up a bridgehead through space

and time, here, to High Wycombe.'

'What do they want?' asked Romana.

'Well, their ambition has always been to rule the universe,' the

Doctor said.

'Why doesn't that surprise me?' asked Romana.

'But High Wycombe is a very strange place to start.' The Doctor

paused, deep in thought, and then clicked his fingers. 'Of course!'

'What?' asked Romana.

'It's obvious. I should have thought of it sooner!'

Romana sighed. 'What?'

'Leylines,' said the Doctor. 'The lines of telekinetic energy that run

through the very structure of the universe.'

'Yes, I know what they are, thank you,' said Romana haughtily.

The Doctor gestured to the house. 'And a vital point on one such

leyline must pass right across this estate. If I had my divining rod on

me I bet you it'd go straight up.'

'So,' said Romana, 'the spiders travelled along the leylines and

hopped off here?'

The Doctor nodded. 'In a manner of speaking. Of course, they can't

actually hop, not with eight legs, but generally they're very nimble

creatures.' He turned back to look up at the house and rubbed his chin

thoughtfully. 'I reckon they must be exhausted after the journey, and

they're getting their strength up in preparation to emerge and try to take

over the universe again.'

'Hence the pizzas,' said Romana.

'I'm afraid it's worse than that,' said the Doctor gravely.

'They've got

at least one live human all wrapped up in there.'

Romana was appalled. She felt a wave of coldness pass through her

body. 'That's disgusting.'

'Quite.' The Doctor tutted. 'I'm afraid it looks very much like we're

going to have to do something to stop them, Romana.' He knelt down

and patted K9 on the ears. 'Listen, dog. We're going to go in there and

confront the enemy in its lair. You stay out here on guard, all right?'

'Affirmative, Master,' said K9.

'But,' the Doctor continued, loosening his scarf a little around his

neck, 'if we're not out of there in fifteen minutes, K9, I want you to

turn that little nose of yours on and bring the whole building down,

spiders and all. Got it?'

K9's eyescreen flashed in concern. 'Master,' he protested, 'my

function is to protect and assist you -'

The Doctor cut him off. 'No buts. Now. .' He pointed to the drainpipe that ran up the side of the house. 'Come along, Romana -

we've got work to do.'

The two spiders had completed their feast and were smacking their jaws

contentedly on the Fordyces' carpet. The terrified humans cowered

before them.

'Most pleasant,' said the first spider. 'The meat and grease is good

for us, and our energy levels have nearly returned to optimum.'

Mrs Fordyce stepped forward. 'Then - you will soon leave us, as you

promised?'

The spiders seemed to catch each other's beady eyes and giggled.

'Oh, yes,' said the second spider. 'We Eight-Legs never go back on a

promise. Soon, we shall leave this house for ever, never to return.'

Mr Fordyce spoke up. 'And you'll let all of our friends go?'

The spiders giggled again. 'Yes, they will soon be released from the

webs. And neither of you will have anything to worry about. Ever

again, ha ha ha.'

Mr and Mrs Fordyce didn't like the sound of the spiders' words and

wicked cackle at all. But before they could remark on the spiders'

puzzling sense of humour, both the alien monsters twitched suddenly

and went deathly still. Another spidery voice, even more horrible and

sibilant, spoke. It seemed to come from thin air.

'Underlings,' it said, in the commanding tones of one not used to

being questioned. 'Cease your gibbering. This is the dawning of the



New Age of the Eight-Legs. It is not a time for frivolity.'

The spiders cowered and sagged. 'We are sorry, O Queen.'

The evil voice spoke again. 'Now hear me. I am almost ready to

release the eggs. Hatching will begin soon after.'

The spiders cooed. 'Good news, O Queen.'

'Indeed,' said the voice. 'But know that I have detected a deadly

enemy in our midst, one who wishes to destroy us.'

The spiders hissed. 'Who is this enemy?'

'I cannot be sure. But you must seek him out and destroy him; do

you hear me?'

The spiders inclined their vile bodies to their unseen mistress. 'We

will seek him out and destroy him.'

The Fordyces clung to each other desperately and watched as the

spiders scuttled out of the front room. Mrs Fordyce's teeth chattered.

'Did that thing say hatching will begin soon after?'

The Doctor and Romana were now on the first floor of the house,

having climbed through an open window into the Fordyces' bedroom.

The Doctor pressed the light switch but nothing happened. He lit a

match and cast light on a horrific scene - the double bed was occupied

by two human shapes entirely wrapped in sticky web.

'You know what I think, Romana?' the Doctor whispered. 'These

spiders are pretty much like their titchy cousins in many ways. I think

there could be a leader somewhere. A guiding influence.'

'I see. And if we put pay to him we'll be out of the woods?'

The Doctor nodded. 'Although I think it's probably a her. The grandmother of them all.' He padded as quietly as he could across the

carpeted room and gently opened a door in one corner. A wave of heat

shimmered over his face. 'Ah. The airing cupboard.' He lit a second

match and gave a low whistle. Romana craned over his shoulder to see.

The small airing cupboard contained a number of neatly folded

items of clothing, a boiler and a tangle of pipes. This was normal

enough. But everything was coated in sticky strands of web - and most

terrifying of all, a huge, thin, hairy jointed limb curled from a hole in

the ceiling and around the pipes.

'I think that must be her leg,' said the Doctor.

Romana looked down and saw that the leg came to rest inside a

large glass tank on the floor. There was a murky brown liquid inside.

'What's that?'

'It's taken another opportunity to feed,' said the Doctor. 'It's absorbing the liquid alcohol from that canister.' He sniffed. 'Barley

wine, I'd say. The man of the house must be a keen home-brewer.' He

smiled suddenly. 'My auntie was a keen home-brewer.'

Romana shook him. 'Never mind about her. The Queen Spider

must be upstairs, in the attic.'

'Indeed.' The Doctor tapped her on the shoulder. 'Right. Plan of

action. I'll slip up and deal with her. You stay here. If anything goes

wrong. .' He trailed off.

'If anything goes wrong?' prompted Romana.

'Just do your best and don't worry.' He was gone before Romana

could object. She looked at her watch. There were now only ten

minutes left before the expiry of the Doctor's deadline to K9. She was

confident of the Doctor's ability to improvise, but she knew also that he

had an unfortunate tendency to make mistakes. Were ten minutes long

enough to defeat such a menace?

She was just looking at her watch again when she felt a gentle

pressure on her shoulder. 'Doctor,' she sighed, 'I do wish you'd stop

doing that. You'll give me the fright of my lives one of these days -'

Her words become a scream as she saw that perched on her shoulder was one of the spiders. She thrashed about wildly in an

attempt to dislodge it, but the canny creature had entangled its legs in

her long blonde hair. She felt a weight land on her back, as if a blow

had been struck, as the second spider jumped up. And then it started to

invade her mind.

'Who are you?' it demanded.

Romana was powerless to resist.

The Doctor had found a ladder to the loft in place on the landing and

ascended it carefully. He estimated he had only a matter of minutes to

defeat the spiders, and was still trying to think up a way of doing so

when he popped his head over the hatch and into the dark, musty

recesses of the attic.

The Queen Spider dominated the scene, its huge furry body slumped malignantly in the centre and its eight horrible legs stretched

out in all directions. The Doctor knew instinctively that there was no

reasoning with such an evil being.

He peered closely at it, and was pleased to see that its row of eyes

looked dormant and unseeing. He listened intently. There was a steady

rising and falling tone on the air. 'Good grief,' he whispered. 'It's

snoring. Must still be whacked out and need to conserve its energy.

This puts a new light on things.' The Doctor considered his next move.

Suddenly he had a brainwave.

Treading with the utmost care and caution, he stepped over the

Queen Spider's nearest leg, lifted it ever so gently and slowly, and then

did the same to the next. When he had both legs in hand he carefully

tied them together, checking all the time to see that the Queen lay

undisturbed. He examined his handiwork with pleasure. 'And they said

I was a rotten knotter,' he said. 'I should have this business tied up in

no time. With the Queen Spider put out of action the others should be

easy to pick off.'

He had just started work on the third leg when there was a fearsome

clattering on the metal steps of the ladder. Immediately the Queen

Spider began to stir. 'Who dares to disturb my rest?'

The Doctor watched as Romana appeared at the top of the stairs.

He tried frantically to shush her. 'What do you think you're doing?'

Romana spoke in a strange, cold, icy voice. 'O Queen, it is us, your

underlings. We have taken possession of this, your enemy,  
and brought

her to you.'

'Oh no,' sighed the Doctor. 'She's been got at. These girls  
can't look

after themselves for five minutes. I wonder why I ever leave  
them

alone.' He slunk into a dark corner where he hoped he would  
go

unobserved.

'Bring her closer,' said the Queen.

Romana stepped right up to the Queen's body. At her feet  
scuttled

the two spiders. The Queen's row of glittering eyes bored  
into her very

brain.

'Yes,' it said. 'Yes. .interesting. .very interesting. .This  
creature is a

Time Lord.'

The other spiders gave a sharp intake of breath. 'The one  
who nearly

destroyed us before was a Time Lord!' they cried. 'Could this  
be the

same one? Can she be the Doctor?'



'Pah,' the Doctor muttered under his breath.

'No,' said the Queen. 'But this one also has much knowledge. We

will drain her mind of its secrets. .Learn the power to travel freely

through space and time. .Discover the weaknesses of a thousand

million different species across the universe. .The Eight-Legs will be

unstoppable!' The Queen paused and licked her lips. 'And then we shall

feast on her body. How fitting that a Time Lord should be the *hors*

*d'oeuvre* on our menu of galactic domination!'

She rattled her huge legs in excitement - and shrieked as she realised

that two of them had been tied together. 'What is this? Who has dared

to perpetrate this - this outrage on the Queen of the Almighty Eight-

Legs?'

The Doctor, who had been feeling rather left out of things in his

corner, stepped forward. 'Ahem. I'm afraid that was me. I'm dreadfully

sorry, you know, because everyone *should* have their ambitions, but I

really can't allow you to do the things you've just said you're going to

do."What? Whaaat?" The Queen rose up as far as she could. 'And who

are you to address me in this way?'

'Oh, just a humble traveller,' said the Doctor.

The Queen's piercing gaze transfixed him. 'No - you are the Doctor!

I recognize you, although you have completely changed your

appearance and personality!'

'Thanks,' said the Doctor. 'It's always nice to have made an impression.'

'You destroyed our colony on Metebelis 3!' shrieked the Queen.

'You are the deadliest enemy of the Eight-Legs!'

'You old flatterer,' said the Doctor. 'Any very talented, intelligent

and amusing person who happened to have been passing by could have

done it.'

'You will pay for your crimes!' the Queen ranted. She turned to her

underlings. 'Prepare them. We shall feast on their living bodies as we

suck the knowledge from their minds.'

The first of the spiders leapt through the air and knocked the

Doctor to the ground. He struggled to stand, but its strong legs had

him pinioned. Drool started to fall from its snapping jaws. He twisted

his head and saw, on the other side of the attic, that Romana was in an

identical predicament. 'Hang on, Romana!' he cried.

'Doctor,' she called, now released from her trance. 'They're going to

kill us!'

'Try not to panic,' he called. 'Lie back and think of Gallifrey!' But as

the spider's snapping jaws came over closer, the Doctor found it very

difficult to follow his own advice.

Meanwhile, outside in the garden, K9's internal clock had ticked down

fifteen minutes. He waited just a moment more - the Doctor had a

habit of emerging just in the nick of time - but nothing happened. So

he wheeled himself a short distance back for safety, cocked his head,

and let forth a beam of red-hot laser energy at the roof of No. 9

Honeysuckle Close. There was a blast of white fire and then flames

started to pour from the exposed section.

The patio door slid open suddenly and the Fordyces, looking bedraggled and confused, emerged. K9 turned his attentions to them.

'Halt. Are you friend or foe?'

Mrs Fordyce gave a little yell. 'What is it, Patrick?' she asked her

husband.

K9 decided they were little threat and directed another laser blast at

the house, this time on the lower floor. A window shattered and smoke

billowed out.

The scene in the attic was one of utter chaos and confusion.  
Smoke

had blurred Romana's vision, and she was coughing  
violently.

Thankfully the spider's grip on her had been loosened and  
she was able

to knock its fat, furry bulk away.

She heard the voice of the Queen Spider. 'What is  
happening? What

is happening?'

Romana sensed the Doctor's reassuring presence at her side.  
'That'll

be K9,' he said. 'We'd better get out of here, and take those  
humans

with us.'

He led her to the ladder and lowered her down. Romana  
turned for

a last look at the Queen, who was struggling to move. No.  
.Stop

them.. ' the creature cried. 'Destroy them.. '

There was another huge blast of K9's ray and the whole roof  
was

sliced off.

Out in the garden, K9 considered the sight of the Queen Spider. It

appeared to be an incredibly tenacious creature, and he doubted

whether even his firepower would be enough to cope with it.

It was with great relief that he saw the Doctor and Romana, joined

by an odd assortment of humans who looked half-dazed and were

covered in strands of cobweb, running from the house.

'I have followed your instructions, Master,' K9 said.

'I'd noticed,' said the Doctor.

Romana tugged the Doctor's sleeve and pointed. 'Look!'

The two underling spiders were scuttling for their lives from the

burning house. Quick as a flash, the Doctor threw himself spectacularly

through the air and managed to come crashing down on them with his

full weight.

Romana raced over. 'Well done, Doctor!'

The Doctor pulled himself up and dusted himself down. 'I can't take

all the credit. J. P. R. Williams taught me that tackle.' He wagged a

finger at the spiders, who were getting unsteadily to their feet. 'They'll

have sore heads for a week now.'

Suddenly the voice of the Queen boomed out over them all.

'Doctor, you are a fool to think that such a puny attack could destroy

me!'

The Doctor looked up. The Queen sat on the exposed roof, but had

somehow managed to put out the fire.

The Doctor called up, 'How did you do that?'

The Queen cackled, 'Simple. I blew it out,' emphasising the point by

opening its mouth wide and blowing hard, knocking them all over like

ninepins.

The Doctor got to his feet. 'You're finished. You're just an old queen who doesn't know when it's time to give up.'

'On the contrary, Doctor,' said the Queen, 'my plans are about to

begin. Soon, the eggs beneath me will hatch. The Eight-Legs will swarm

over this pathetic speck of a planet and consume all the humans!' The

spider lifted its legs to reveal clusters of slimy eggs. The Doctor

whispered to Romana, 'She's got us there. If she manages to hatch

those eggs we'll be done for.'

There was a sudden noise of a ringing alarm bell. From out of the

darkness surrounding the estate there emerged a gleaming red fire

engine. Within seconds, a team of firefighters dressed in oilskins and

yellow helmets poured out into the garden.

'Blimey,' said their leader, 'what's happening here?'

The Doctor gaped at him. 'Is that a hosepipe in your hand?'

'Yes,' said the fireman.

'In that case,' said the Doctor, snatching it from him, 'I'm very

pleased to see you.' He called over his shoulder, 'Switch on!'

The firefighters in the fire engine took this to be an order from their



leader, and moments later a fountain of water gushed from the pipe.

The Doctor angled it expertly up, right at the Queen Spider's eyes. It

shrieked and curled up its legs. 'Come on, everybody!' he called.

Romana took her cue and grabbed another hosepipe. Soon the

firefighters had joined in, and the Queen was being doused from many

different directions. Ruined eggs went slewing off from under the

spider's bloated body in the deluge of water, and its grip on the roof

was weakening. A couple of legs slid off.

'She won't be able to blow this out!' cried the Doctor.

He was right. After a couple of minutes, the drenched Queen

Spider, shrieking in its death throes, had toppled from the roof of No.

9 Honeysuckle Close and was splattered all around the garden.

Time had passed. The Doctor had sent the firefighters and the

Fordyces' party guests on their bewildered way, although he had

lingered briefly to take a cup of tea with the unhappy couple themselves.

And now, he, Romana and K9 were preparing to leave. At Romana's feet was a large box.

'Are you sure this is a good idea?' she asked.

The Doctor nodded. 'Everyone deserves a second chance.'  
He knelt

down and put his mouth to the grille on the front of the box.  
'You

won't try anything like this again, will you?'

The first spider said meekly, 'We were the victims of a false doctrine.'

The second piped up, 'Now that the Queen is gone we wish to live

only modest lives.'

The Doctor nodded, satisfied, and stood up. 'There you are, Romana. We'll take them with us and drop them off on Arachnos.

There's a planet full of giant spiders there, and they're all very pleasant

chaps. There are giant flies too, so they won't go hungry again.'

Romana took a last look around the Riverdale Estate.  
'There's still

the small matter of my five pounds.'

The Doctor pretended to be baffled. 'What five pounds?'

'Five pounds to me if anything unusual was happening here,' she

reminded him.

'Oh, that.'

'And I think being attacked by giant spiders qualifies.'

The Doctor considered. 'That's not unusual. Romana, things like

that are *always* happening to us.'

He ushered her and K9 into the TARDIS, and a little later the blue

police box faded away. .on its way to new adventures.

Hot Ice

by Christopher Bulis

It was one o'clock in the morning when Len Skeggs slipped through the

back gate of No. 47 Risemore Way and stole silently up the garden. The

night was cool, still and moonless, with a haze of mist in the air. The

distant orange glow of streetlights silhouetted the rows of houses all

around him, but the strip of common ground on to which their gardens

backed was pooled in shadow.

No. 47 had attracted Len's professional interest for several reasons.

It was a large detached house in a good area, but looked a little shabby.

There was no sign of any alarm system, and the sole occupant was a

hunched old man who hardly ever ventured out. In Len's experience,

people living in such circumstances often preferred to keep their cash

and valuables at home rather than in the bank.

Len reached the small brick patio on to which French windows

opened from the back lounge. Through the glass he could see the key

glinting in the door lock. This was going to be too easy. He attached a

suction cup from his tool bag to the pane beside the lock, then he drew

a circle about it with a glass cutter.

The hardened blade of the cutter simply slid across the glass without

making a scratch.

He scowled and tried again, pressing harder. Once more the tool slid

aside as though moving on a film of oil. He simply could not get the

cutter to bite. Obviously this was some new type of security glass he

had not come across before.

Cursing silently, Len picked out a jemmy. It would be noisier, but he

was not a man to give up easily. He thrust its claw end into the gap

around the doorframe and heaved.

There was no snap of splintering wood and the door remained

absolutely rigid and immobile. With a grunt of anger, Len heaved again

with all his strength. There was a sharp metallic twang and he sat down

heavily. The tip of the jemmy had broken off.

Even as he gaped at the door incredulously, he became aware of an

eerie sound. It seemed to reverberate through the very ground under

him, faint and breathless; a whirring and groaning that rose and fell as it

grew steadily stronger.

Snatching up his bag, Len darted away from the patio into the

shadow of a garden shed.

The Doctor stepped out of the TARDIS doorway, playing a torch

beam about the cool, dark and silent chamber in which they had

materialised. Peri cautiously followed him.

'It feels like some kind of cellar,' she said.

'Probably because it is,' the Doctor agreed, placing his panama hat

on his head, his youthful face bright and alert. 'Be it ever so humble,

however, this is the place.'

'But you don't think this coherent neutrino pulse thing you detected

is dangerous?' Peri asked, trying to sound nonchalant.

'Nothing to do

with an invasion of googly-eyed monsters or something?'

'Most unlikely. The source seems relatively low-powered and isn't

steady enough for a beacon. It just doesn't belong in this time and

place.' He smiled mischievously. 'Besides, whoever heard of aliens

starting an invasion in Surbiton? A common north-west of Woking

perhaps, but never Surbiton.'

Peri recognised the allusion. 'Do you have to bring up H. G. Wells?

Those blood-sucking Martian octopuses of his always did give me the

creeps.'

'I can assure you, Peri, from personal experience, that there are

absolutely no blood-sucking octopuses on Mars.'

'That's a relief.'

'Just seven-foot-tall humanoid warrior lizards. Ah, here we are. .'

There was the click of a switch and fluorescent tubes flickered into life,

filling the room with cool light.

Peri blinked and looked about her. The cellar was some twenty feet

square, brick-lined, with stone flags on the floor. In the corner an iron-

balustraded flight of steps led up to a wooden door, standing slightly

ajar. Running the entire length of one wall was a wooden workbench,

fitted with power points and scattered with hand-tools and items of

salvaged electronic equipment. Resting on a small stand in the middle

of the bench was a fluted tube of red metal, about six feet long, ringed

at one end with a cluster of dull black spheres, each of which trailed a

bundle of multicoloured wires. The Doctor stepped over and examined

the device with deep interest.

'Yes, this is the source of the neutrino pulse all right,' he pronounced.

'No kidding,' Peri said. 'If I asked what it was for, would I understand the answer?'



'Well, it's part of a star-drive module. It functions rather like a spark

plug in an internal combustion engine, giving the initial kick to initiate

the lepton-flux implosion -'

'OK - I get the picture,' said Peri. 'So we guess an alien's broken

down on Earth and he's trying to fix his engine with bits and pieces

he's found here, right?'

'That is the most likely explanation.'

'So where is he?' She looked about her nervously. 'Or do I mean,

where is it? And is he, or it, friendly?'

Just then they heard the groaning. It was very faint and came from

the direction of the half-open cellar door. After a few seconds it

degenerated into a fit of feeble coughing.

'That doesn't sound too good,' Peri said.

'No,' agreed the Doctor, making for the steps.

The cellar door opened out from under the house's main staircase

on to a wide bare hall, with the front door at one end and three other

doors, all closed, leading off it. Except for a single dim bulb burning at

the very top of the stairwell two floors above, all was in darkness.

'Hello,' the Doctor called out loudly. 'Is anybody there?'

There came another moan, louder than the one they'd heard before,

followed by what might have been a string of muffled, indecipherable

words.

'Upstairs,' said the Doctor, leading the way.

All the doors opening off the first landing were closed and no lights

showed underneath them. The distressed voice still came from above,

getting steadily louder as they ascended. A single door opened off the

second landing. Coughs and groans and muttering could be heard

behind it.

'Hello, the Doctor said. 'Are you all right?'

The sounds continued undiminished. With a small shrug, the Doctor

tried the door. It opened smoothly.

The long attic room with half-sloping walls was unlit except for the

glow of city lights filtering in through a single dormer window. The

Doctor switched on his torch again and swung it about. In the far

corner was a iron-framed single bed. On it was a body-shaped mound

covered with a blanket, from which came more groans, interspersed

with slurred, rasping words.

They stepped quickly over the bed, the Doctor saying reassuringly,

'It's all right. We're here to help you.' Handing Peri the torch, he pulled

back the blanket.

Underneath was a portable stereo cassette player resting between

two pillows laid lengthwise. Even as they stared at the machine in

surprise, another fit of recorded coughing issued from the speakers.

The landing door slammed shut behind them, followed by the sound of

heavy bolts sliding into place.

The Doctor ran to the door and twisted the handle, at the same

time throwing his shoulder against it, but the door remained firmly

shut. He gave a resigned sigh and thrust his hands into his pockets. Peri

fought to keep her voice steady. 'Looks like we've walked into a trap,

huh?'

'I'm afraid so. What about the window?'

They examined the dormer. The latches had been removed and the

frame had been screwed securely into place.

'Even if we could get out, it would be a dangerous drop,' the Doctor

admitted. And I don't think we could improvise a long enough rope

from that blanket. Somebody seems to have thought of everything.'

'Can't we signal with the torch?' Peri suggested.

'I don't think many people will be looking out for SOSs at this time

of the morning.'

Peri stared out into the misty darkness, trying to stay calm. Just what

the hell wanted to keep them here?

Len crouched beside the garden shed thinking hard. He'd rationalised

away the odd sound that had disturbed him as some old central heating

boiler starting up. Now he was reasoning further that security doors

that tough had to be protecting something valuable. If only he could

find a way through them.

Just then a flicker of movement at the bottom of the garden caused

him to shrink further back into the shadows. Two figures were making

their way silently towards the house. As they passed within a few yards

of him, he realised that they were wearing dark full-length robes with

hoods pulled over their heads, bearing an uncanny resemblance to

monks in cassocks. They paused before the French windows.  
After a

minute there was a brief flash of light. The door opened and  
they

passed inside.

Len knew he should go now that there were others in the  
house, but

the lure of the wide-open door, and the thought that this  
unlikely duo

were hardly stiff opposition, held him back. He waited a  
couple of

minutes to see if the 'monks' would emerge again, then cat-  
footed over

to the door - only to stop short in amazement. A perfect half-  
circle

about the frame had been neatly cut away. The 'monks' had  
broken in.

They were in the same line of business as he was!

Len now knew for certain he was on to something big;  
maybe the

job of a lifetime. He smiled, grimly; he'd poke about himself,  
find out

just what this pair were after, then take it off their hands.  
Pulling on his

balaclava mask, and reassured by the weight of the jemmy in his hand,

he stepped inside.

Up in the attic room, Peri held the torch while the Doctor methodically

ran his hands around the doorframe, looking for any hidden catch or

weak point.

'I really must get round to building another sonic screwdriver,' he

muttered. 'It's just the thing for this sort of situation.'

'Give it up, Doctor,' she said. 'Why don't we check the walls again?'

Just then there was the sound of bolts being withdrawn from outside.

The Doctor raised his eyebrows in surprise and cautiously tried the

handle. The door opened easily.

'How did you do that?' Peri said, impressed.

'I didn't. Somebody wanted to keep us here for a while and now they

want us to leave.' The Doctor looked about him, a grim expression on

his face. 'Well, we're not going to play your game any more.'  
he said

clearly. 'We're staying here until you show yourself and  
explain what's

going on.'

There was a sudden hissing sound. A plume of white vapour  
poured

out of a vent in the skirting board beside the bed and  
billowed across

the room. The Doctor swept Peri out through the door with  
him and

slammed it shut behind them.

'Perhaps a strategic withdrawal is indicated,' he said, as the  
vapour

began to seep under the door.

They hurried downstairs to the ground floor and turned  
towards the

cellar. As they went through the hall, they failed to notice  
that the

lounge door, which had been closed when they'd passed  
earlier, was

now open a crack. In the crack an eye glinted.

Len had spent some minutes in the lounge rifling through a  
bureau and



checking hopefully for wall safes behind pictures. But the room had

proved disappointing; sparsely furnished with dusty furniture. He had

decided to explore the rest of the house and actually had his hand on

the door handle when he heard rapid footsteps on the stairs.

He didn't know what to make of the joker in the weird clothes -

was that really celery on his coat? - or his companion, except that she

was a very tasty piece indeed. Had they been the ones in the robes and

hoods, he wondered? And why were they in such a hurry to go down to

the cellar? He listened intently for a couple of minutes and thought he

could just make out the faintest murmur of voices from below, but that

was all. Cautiously he started to ease the door open, only to hear a faint

click and swish from the hall. Once more he peered through the crack

between door and jamb.

The hunched figure of the occupier of No. 47 appeared from the

direction of the kitchen and moved silently across the hall to the open

cellar door. In his hand, Len noticed, he carried a short stick. He stood

there for a minute as though listening for any sound from below. Then,

obviously satisfied, he also descended into the cellar.

The Doctor and Peri stopped short as they reached the bottom of the

cellar steps, as they realised things were not as they had left them. A

heavy cable now ran from the half-open door of the TARDIS over to

the workbench, where it was wired into the mechanism from the alien

star drive.

'Somebody sure is playing games with us,' Peri said, as the Doctor

led the way into the TARDIS, stepping over the snaking cable.

A panel at the base of the main console had been opened, exposing

a junction box into which the cable had been plugged. But it was not

this that caught their attention.

Resting on top of the console was a flat black box about eighteen

inches wide. On it was mounted a transparent dome containing within

it the largest gemstone Peri had ever seen. It was the size of a small fist

and its faces glittered with blue-green fire under the lights.

'Wow! Will you look at that!' she exclaimed, gazing at the jewel in

fascination. 'It must be your birthday, Doctor. Somebody's left you a

present.'

'An unwanted gift,' the Doctor said tersely, 'which I think we would

do well to -'

'Stay where you are, blasphemers!' said a flat voice behind them.

They turned round. Two black-robed figures stood by the doorway,

their faces concealed within the shadows of their hoods. Each had one

arm extended towards them, and from their voluminous sleeves

projected what looked like magician's wands. For featureless rods they

appeared unaccountably menacing.

The two figures glided forward, and Peri realised with a start that

though their trailing robes did not quite touch the ground, there was no

sign of feet or legs under them. As they came closer she felt unnatural

warmth radiating from their bodies, causing beads of perspiration to

form on her brow. The figure on the left extended another rod, silver

and bulbous-tipped, from his other sleeve and pointed it at the gem and

its container. Immediately the tip pulsed with green light.

'Our quest is ended,' he said, quiet triumph sounding in the flat

tones. 'The tracer has led us to the Eye of Gaar - and to those who

stole it!'

'The Eye of Gaar?' echoed Peri, incredulously.

'Careful, Peri,' the Doctor said airily. 'It really doesn't do to mock

the nomenclature of alien icons.' He turned back to the priests. 'So.

You're Ventrosians, I take it.'

'We are priests of the Temple of Gaar on Ventros Prime, and we

have been entrusted with the task of recovering the Eye.'

'Well, how do you do? I'm the Doctor and this is my friend Peri -'

'Silence! We have already scanned you. We also recognise this vessel,

Time Lord. Did you use it to aid your Ventrosian accomplice in the

theft of the Eye?'

'But we didn't steal it!' Peri protested. 'We've been framed.'

'Keep your native servant quiet,' the priest warned the Doctor.

'Who are you calling a servant!' Peri said indignantly.

'I'm afraid Ventrosians aren't the most subtle of beings, Peri, the

Doctor explained, an edge beneath his light words. 'Always had

something of a superiority complex. That was why, millennia ago, we

refused to share our technology with them - and they've resented us for

it ever since. But I didn't think they would be so foolish as to believe

we would covet one of their holy relics!'

'Then why is your craft connected to a drive unit from the thief's

vessel?' the priest asked.

As my friend tried to tell you, someone wants you to believe that

we're the guilty parties. We've been used, can't you see that?'

'We see only thieves and conspirators who have been caught with

the Eye in their possession. For this crime there can be but one

punishment.'

'Why can't you listen to reason?' the Doctor pleaded.

'We sense the protective fields within your craft, Time Lord, but our

personal auras can negate them,' the priest continued remorselessly.

'The sentence will be carried out immediately. When your accomplice

returns, he will suffer the same fate.'

The Doctor frowned. 'For the last time, we don't have an accomp-

The priests raised their wands a little higher.

'No!' the Doctor shouted.

Even as Peri threw herself sideways, a flicker of blue fire lashed out

and transfixed her. It was as though she had received an electric shock.

Her muscles spasmed, then went numb. She stumbled and fell, slumped

helplessly against the wall of the console room, with the Doctor,

similarly incapacitated, collapsing at her side. The priests loomed over

them like black ghosts.

'There is no escape. Now you will die - slowly and painfully, so that

you will have time to reflect upon the enormity of your crime. May

Gaar have mercy upon you.'

The wands glowed red, and it felt to Peri that her skin was on fire.

She tried to scream, but even that release was denied her.

Len peered down into the cellar from the shadows at the top of the

steps. Greed and curiosity were finely balanced within him now. He had

to know what was going on almost as much as he wanted to find

something of value.

What was the old man doing standing in front of the half-open door

of old-fashioned police call box, his whole attention apparently focused

upon it? What was the box doing here anyway? And where were the

man and the woman he'd seen coming down? They couldn't be hiding

in the box itself, could they? Why would they, anyway? Even so, there

was an odd sort of light coming from it, and he imagined he could

make out the murmur of voices.

Then the old man stepped forward.



Peri was hardly aware of a fifth figure entering the console room

through the agony that was racking her body. All she knew was that the

room was suddenly lit up by two quick bursts of intense light,

accompanied by a searing crackling sound, and then that the terrible

pain vanished as though turned off by a switch.

Smoke was billowing in the air, together with fluttering scraps of

burning fabric. Glowing ashes and twisted metal lay where the priests

had stood, while their power wands and tracer device rolled loosely

across the floor.

Unable to speak or turn her head, it was all Peri could do to blink

her eyes until they focused on the stout, slightly hunchbacked figure of

an old man, dressed in crumpled trousers and a baggy jumper. The

benign expression on his wrinkled face was so reassuring that she would

have cried out in relief, if she had been able to move her lips. Then she

saw he was carrying a power wand identical to those of the priests.

'At last I am rid of them!' he said, as though half to himself. His

features did not reflect the triumphant nature of his words, which were,

if anything, in even flatter tones than those of the creatures he had

killed. His dark eyes flickered across Peri and the Doctor as they lay

helplessly against the wall. 'The paralysis will soon wear off, but by then

I will have gone.'

He walked over to the console and carefully gathered up the box

holding the Eye of Gaar. Peri felt a wash of heat as he moved. He

looked at the Doctor.

'You would not understand why I had to steal the Eye. Suffice to

say I felt it necessary,' he continued. 'But I could not escape my

pursuers. Eventually I was forced to land on this inhospitable planet.

Fortunately I soon detected the energy signature of your TARDIS's

frequent visits here, and used my own star drive to lure you - and the

priests - to me. You were most convincing targets for their wrath.'

The Doctor concentrated, screwed up his eyes, forcing out words. 'A. . diversion. .'

The old man nodded. 'The interior of this vessel, you see, was the

only place they would not be able to sense my approach until it was too

late.' Out of the corner of her eye, Peri caught a flicker of movement. A

black masked head had looked in through the door, then withdrawn.

She tried to speak, but all that came out was a groan.

'Now it is over and I am free to leave,' the old man went on. 'I will

take the priests' vessel. No one from Ventros Prime will ever find me

again. Thank you, Time Lord, for your unwitting assistance.'

He turned away and walked out of the TARDIS.

Len did not care how the trick with the inside of the police box

was done, or what had happened to the man and woman

slumped against the wall. He had eyes only for the most fabulous gem

he had ever seen. He was right: this really was the chance of a lifetime.

And so, as the old man stepped out through the narrow door, Len hit

him across the back of the neck with his jemmy.

He knew there was something wrong even as the blow struck. The

old man's body radiated impossible heat, and it was not flesh and bone

that crumpled under the blow as he fell to the floor, dropping the gem

case to claw at his hunched shoulders. To Len's horror a flap of white-

haired skin was hanging loose from the back of the man's head,

revealing a shell of torn foil and spongy fibres underneath.

Then, even as Len froze in sickened disbelief, the old man ceased

his writhing and rose back upright - except that his legs were now

dangling limply, and were clearly not supporting him.

Len snatched up the gem case and dashed for the stairs. Halfway up,

a hole exploded in the wall behind him, peppering him with fragments

of brick and mortar. He glanced fearfully over his shoulder. The old

man was pointing some kind of weapon at him with his shaking hands,

and sparks were playing about its tip. And he moved forward as though

carried on invisible wires, his legs trailing behind him, toe-caps dragging

across the ground. In a voice that was rapidly losing all semblance of

humanity, the old man cried, 'Thief! Return that crystal or die!'

Len dived through the cellar door, and the old man glided unsteadily

up the steps after him, thin tendrils of steam seeping out of his clothes.

They had heard the commotion in the cellar from inside the TARDIS,

then the sounds of pursuit fading into the distance. After a few

minutes, Peri felt the tingling of life returning to her limbs. With an

obvious effort, the Doctor sat up beside her. With his support, she

struggled to her feet.

She licked her lips and managed to say, 'Pretty ironic. . I think our

thief got mugged.'

The Doctor picked up the priests' tracer device and tried the control

switch. The tip remained dark. 'Power cell burnt out by secondary

discharge,' he muttered. He retrieved his torch and they walked stiffly

out into the cellar. He sniffed, frowning. 'Can you smell that?'

There was a sickly odour of decay hanging in the air.

'Yeah, it stinks. What does it mean?'

'It means that at least one thief is going to die tonight if we don't

prevent it. Come on.'

They followed the foul scent through the lounge, its French

windows now blasted apart and smoking, across the patio and down

the garden. Out on the common the trail faded into the misty night air.

They found the alien after several minutes of searching by torchlight. He was lying amid the tussocky grass, a crumpled form

wreathed in steam and twitching feebly. There was no sign of the man

in the balaclava.

The stench grew worse as they drew nearer, and Peri covered her

mouth, retching. The Doctor, apparently now oblivious to the smell,

knelt beside the creature. A voice grated from somewhere within the

body, but the lips on the macabre face no longer moved; the benign

expression was now frozen, mask-like, on the face.

'Lost. . him. Motivator unit. . failed.'

'We must get you back to the house,' the Doctor said.

'Too late, Time Lord.. At least the priests did not get the Eye.  
'

Then he sagged and was still. Vapour began to pour more rapidly

from his clothes.

'Stand back,' the Doctor warned.

The human disguise split and fell away, the clothes disintegrating to

reveal the rods and joints of mechanical limbs and layers of insulation

underneath. Within all this Peri glimpsed a slender wormlike creature

that seemed to be melting before her eyes. It was supported by a lattice

of metal bands and tubes that connected to a complex backpack which

was cracked down one side. With a furious rush of steam, the thing

bubbled and flashed into flame.

'He chose to chase after his precious Eye instead of waiting to repair

his life-support unit,' the Doctor said sadly, as they stood back from

the blaze. 'He must have built an environment chamber for himself

somewhere in the house.'



'What happened?' Peri demanded. 'It looked as though he was

melting away. But he was hot, like the priests. I felt it.'

'You felt the heat from his cooling unit, like the coils at the back of

a refrigerator. The Ventrosians live on a frigid world and have an

appropriately volatile body chemistry to compensate. Exposed to Earth

temperatures, he simply burnt up.'

Even as they stared at the dying embers, Peri became aware of a

reddish glow beginning to show through the mist about fifty yards

away. In seconds it had become a perfect sphere of growing intensity,

flashing through orange and then yellow.

'Down!' the Doctor shouted.

There was a dull boom as the sphere disintegrated into a shower of

flaming fragments and a fiery cloud that boiled skyward.

Peri lifted her face from the grass. 'And what was that?'

'The priests' ship, I should think,' said the Doctor. 'It must have had

a timed self-destruct mechanism, activated when it lost track of its

owner's life signs.'

'Those guys were playing for keeps,' she observed.

'Yes. And they've all come out losers, he said bleakly, before scrambling to his feet and pulling Peri up with him. 'Now, back to the

house before people come out to see what's happening. I must repair

the tracer. There's still one thief to track down.'

'The guy? No one's after this Eye of Gaar thing now, are they?

What's the rush?'

'Because he doesn't realise what he's stolen,' said the Doctor, grimly.

The phone in the house was working normally - Peri wondered what

had happened to the original owner of this place, and shuddered. She

dialled a number the Doctor gave her and passed on the request for a

'clean-up squad' to an organisation she'd never heard of called UNIT.

'That's right,' she concluded. 'He said to tell you to call a Brigadier

Lethbridge-Stewart if you wanted to check this is on the level.. No, my

name's not Smith, it's Brown. . Look, just come round here and pick up

the pieces, guys. Good night.'

She hung up and went back to the TARDIS. The Doctor had just

finished inserting a fresh power cell into the tracer. He switched it on

and immediately the tip began to flash green.

'Right,' said the Doctor, 'if I can just fix a range and bearing -'

The light flickered and died. The Doctor worked the switch but to

no effect.

'Flat battery again?' Peri asked.

The Doctor sighed heavily and for a moment he seemed old and

tired, his youthful energy drained. 'No, Peri. The gem-case circuitry has

been damaged. I'm afraid it may be too late.'

In the back of a lock-up garage a little over a mile away, Len Skeggs

swung another frantic blow with his sledgehammer at the gem case,

which he had clamped into a large bench vice. The gemstone he could

conceal easily enough, but its bulky container was a liability. He wanted

nothing lying around that might connect him with the crime - or

whatever that thing was that chased him out of the house. He would

have to break the gem up to sell it on, of course, but even the

fragments of something that size would set him up for life.

The double-walled protective dome suddenly cracked and popped

out of its securing collar, spilling the gem on to the concrete floor. Len

dropped his hammer and eagerly snatched up the precious object

before it could roll away.

A second later he cried out in pain and surprise. The gem was

sticking to his hands, burning his skin with intense cold. As he

struggled to tear it free it began to boil away into gas that stung his eyes

and seared his lungs. Choking and blinded, gasping for clean air, Len

collapsed to the floor and then lay still.

Still clamped in the vice, the gem's environmental-support unit

sparked as its power cells shorted out, sending out a trail of smoke

before hungry flames began to lick up towards the cluttered shelves

over the workbench.

Peri could hear the distant sirens of emergency vehicles as she took one

final look around the cellar, while the Doctor finished making sure the

alien star-drive component that had lured them here was completely

useless.

'And all for a chunk of ammonia and methane ice,' she said.

'Value is often a purely arbitrary concept,' the Doctor said sombrely,

tossing aside the cable that had been connected to the TARDIS

console. 'Many famous Earth jewels have a history of theft and death

behind them, and it would seem that alien gems are no exception.' He

sighed. 'Come on. Let's go somewhere more cheerful. Leave the tidying

up to the professionals.'

She followed him inside the TARDIS, where the air was clean and

fresh. She breathed deeply, but the stink of the alien thief's decaying

body seemed to linger on in her lungs, mingling with dark thoughts of

obsession, greed, and the dead.

uPVC

by Paul Farnsworth

I

Jamie was invariably uneasy whenever the console room was left

unattended. It had become something of a ritual for both Zoe and him

to tease the Doctor over his apparent inability to control the

temperamental time machine, and yet Jamie always felt much safer

when the mysterious little man was in attendance - dancing around the

mushroom-shaped console, checking dials, adjusting controls,

muttering to himself as he brooded over the instruments.

This time the Doctor had set the co-ordinates quickly before disappearing into the labyrinthine depths of the TARDIS, assuring

Jamie that his machine was perfectly capable of looking after itself.

Jamie knew from experience that this was rarely ever the case.

Something usually went wrong, so he took it upon himself to look in

occasionally, just to ensure that no major catastrophes were taking

place. In all likelihood, Jamie wouldn't recognise a major catastrophe if

it gave him a new kilt for Christmas, let alone be in a position to set the

problem straight, but as long as he was actually here he figured that that

was enough.

He paced around the console, fixing it with a stern gaze as if daring

it to misbehave. The little coloured lights were all winking, apparently

normally, and there was the familiar, persistent hum from the central

column. As far as Jamie was concerned, everything was as it should be.

Then he heard a curious sound.

*BANG-BANG-BANG!*

Startled, Jamie looked up from the console. The sound seemed to be

coming from all around him, vibrating through the walls. At first he

assumed it to be some mechanical fault, but when the noise repeated

itself it became clear that it came from an exterior source.

*BANGBANG-BANG!*

His attention was drawn to the outer doors. It was as if there was

someone out there, knocking on the outside of the TARDIS. Surely

that wasn't possible, Jamie thought. The Doctor had said that it was



impossible for anyone to be outside the TARDIS while it was moving.

Well, impossible or not, he had definitely heard the sound, plainly and

clearly - twice. Keeping his eyes firmly fixed on the door he moved to

the back of the room. 'Doctor!' he called over his shoulder, into the

depths of the time machine. 'Doctor, come here quickly!'

The noise came again, only this time Jamie thought he could hear a

fragile voice accompanying it. He crept closer to the door, bent down

and pressed his ear pressed to it.'

'Hello?' he murmured. 'Hello, is there anyone out there. .'

'Jamie, what on earth do you think you're doing?'

The young Scot stood up straight, finding Zoe standing behind him.

'There's someone out there,' he said.

'Outside the TARDIS?' Zoe looked at him sternly. 'Is this some

kind of prank, Jamie?' she warned him 'Because if it is -'

'Och, it's no' a joke, I tell ye,' Jamie insisted. 'I heard someone out

there.'

Zoe shrugged and cast a baffled look at the door. 'Well,' she said,

'whatever it is, it seems to have stopped now. It's probably nothing.'

As Zoe was speaking the Doctor arrived. 'Hmm?' he said absently.

'What's probably nothing?' He had his head down and was fumbling

with a bundle of odds and ends: a screwdriver, a pencil, a small plastic

tube, all tangled up together with a roll of sticky black electrical tape.

The more the Doctor tried to separate them, the more the tape became

entwined around his own fingers.

'Jamie thinks he heard someone outside,' Zoe explained.

'Outside where?' the Doctor said. 'Outside the TARDIS? No, no,

that's quite impossible.' The Doctor had managed to peel the tape from

his fingers and had twisted it up into a sticky ball - which was now

stuck to his other hand. 'Well,' he said, preoccupied with trying to shake

himself free from the gluey mess. 'What sort of noise, Jamie?'

'It was as if someone was knocking on the doors! Jamie insisted.

Zoe came forward and helped the Doctor peel the tape from his

fingers. 'Oh, oh, thank you, Zoe,' he said with a grateful smile as she

deftly disposed of it for him.

'Doctor, could there be something wrong with the TARDIS?' she

asked.

'You mean, could the noise be the result of some mechanical fault?'

the Doctor pondered as he deposited his collection of odds and ends

on to the console. 'Well, I suppose it's a -'

*BANG-BANG-BANG!*

'Ah!' Jamie cried triumphantly. ' *Now* do you believe me?'

The Doctor stood back from the console, folded his hands over his

chest and looked around the room in alarm. 'Good grief,' he said. 'Now

that's not right. That's not right at all.'

'What is it?' Zoe asked.

'I really don't know, Zoe,' replied the puzzled Doctor.

'There's someone outside,' Jamie insisted. 'Will ye no' listen to me?'

*BANG-BANG-BANG!*

This time the sound was followed by a tiny muffled voice.

'Hello, is there anyone there?'

'Great jumping jellybeans!' exclaimed the Doctor as he cast his

startled gaze at the outer door. 'I think I owe you an apology, Jamie.'

He walked over to the outer doors and pressed himself against them,

listening. 'Hello?' he said after a pause. 'Is there anyone there?'

'Hello?' the voice called back. 'Can anyone hear me?'

The Doctor turned away from the door, shaking his head violently.

'No, no,' he said firmly. This is quite impossible.' He flashed Zoe a

conspiratorial glance. 'Shall we just ignore it? Then perhaps it will go

away.'

He started to walk off, but Zoe stopped him.

'Doctor! You can't just forget about it.'

'I most certainly can, Zoe,' the Doctor said defensively. If I put my

mind to it.'

'But it might be someone who needs our help!' Zoe argued.

'But nobody can exist out there in the vortex!' the Doctor protested.

The sound came again. 'Is there anyone there?' they heard the voice call

faintly.

'Aye, well perhaps someone ought to tell him that,' Jamie said.

The Doctor watched the door uneasily. 'You don't understand,' he

said, and his voice was almost childlike. 'Out there, in the vortex, there

are... things. Phantoms,' the Doctor said. His tone became dark,

melodramatic, but his expression made it clear that he was serious.

'Strange creatures that live in the void and prey on unwary travellers.'

'Oh dear,' Zoe said anxiously. 'I never realised.. '

'Well, how can we tell?' Jamie asked. 'How do we know whether

whoever's out there is one of these "phantoms" or is someone who

really does need our help?'

The Doctor looked at him, then suddenly came to a decision. 'Yes,

Jamie,' he said. 'You're quite right. Now stand back, you two, I'm going

to open the doors.'

Jamie stared at him 'What? Do ye not remember what happened

when Salamander tried to do that?'

'It's risky, Jamie, but if I land first we could lose whoever's holding

on outside for ever.' He clapped his hands together. 'Now come on,

find something to hold on to. No, not Zoe, Jamie, something more

substantial!'

The Doctor moved to the console and stood waiting with his hand

on the door control. Once his companions were gripping the console

firmly, he gave the control a sharp twist and the doors began to open.

Jamie and Zoe screwed up their eyes as they looked into the swirling

patterns of light beyond the open door. They felt the tug of the vortex,

like a wind whipping around their clothes, dragging them, almost

tempting them out. They saw shapes forming and reforming, waves

travelling like ripples through fog. Then a shadow stepped over the

threshold and into the TARDIS, resolving into a tall man with an

elegantly shaped moustache. Stranger still, he was wearing a long beige

coat and held an umbrella above his head. A strange orange glow

formed smokily behind him, although Zoe couldn't see if that was the

Doctor's doing or the stranger's. The din died down, the wind stopped

abruptly and only the usual hum of the TARDIS could be heard.

The stranger smiled. 'Good afternoon,' he said as he collapsed his

umbrella and shook it - needlessly, since it was obviously as dry as a

bone. 'The name's Rigby,' he announced, reaching inside his coat and

producing a small, white rectangle of card. Zoe took it from him and

read it aloud.

'Bill Rigby, ThermoPort Windows Ltd.'

'That's right, Miss,' Rigby said. 'Now tell me, have you ever seriously

considered installing double glazing?'

'Double glazing?' asked Zoe, still somewhat taken aback by this

man's sudden appearance.

'We're not interested!' the Doctor snapped quickly, hovering uncertainly around the other side of the console. He took a step nearer,

but seemed wary about getting too close to this strange man. Rigby

looked at him and turned up his disarming smile another notch. 'I see,

sir,' he said graciously. 'Well, that's fair enough, I'm sorry to have



wasted your time. . Although, before you dismiss me out of hand, why

not see exactly what we have to offer?' He had the condescending air of

a schoolteacher coaxing a small child. 'I have some leaflets here if you'd

care to peruse them?'

He hoisted his briefcase on to the console, clicked open the catches

and opened the lid.

'Leaflets?' the Doctor repeated suspiciously. 'Leaflets? What leaflets?'

'Doctor, what is he on about?' Jamie asked.

'I don't know, Jamie, I don't know.' The Doctor replied. He edged

around the console, hoisting himself up on tiptoe to peer into the

visitor's briefcase.

'Ah, here we are!' Rigby said as he pulled out a thick brochure. 'Now

as you can see, we have quite a wide range of styles. I don't like to

boast, but I think I can say without fear of contradiction that there's

something here to suit every taste. Installation is included in the cost

and you can choose from a wide range of available materials, including

aluminium, wood and uPVC.'

The Doctor cautiously took the brochure from him, turned the page

and furrowed his brow at it.

'Ah! The mock-Georgian leaded bay window,' Rigby crooned approvingly. 'Yes, that's a very popular line. It looks like real wood,

doesn't it? In actual fact it's tough, lightweight uPVC - very hard-

wearing and so easy to clean!'

'It is very nice,' Zoe said. She and Jamie had joined the Doctor and

were looking over his shoulder at the brochure. 'I like the decorative

sill.'"Yes, it is rather nice, isn't it?' the Doctor agreed. 'I much prefer it to

these other ones over here.' Suddenly his manner changed. 'Hang on a

minute, what am I saying? This is no good to me.' He slid the brochure

hurriedly back into Rigby's briefcase.

'But sir!' Rigby protested. 'I don't think you've fully considered the

benefits of good-quality double glazing. Think how it will reduce

heating costs.'

'Not a problem, thank you,' the Doctor said as he gathered up

Rigby's case and thrust it at him.

'Doctor, what's the matter?' Zoe asked.

'We don't need windows!' the Doctor snapped. 'Jamie, Zoe whatever

you do, don't sign anything!'

'But sir, these windows will enhance any room,' Rigby was keen to

point out.

'That's immaterial!' the Doctor said, almost frantic. 'Can't you

understand? What would I want with a window? I mean, I can't have

people hacking great holes in the walls of the TARDIS, now can I?

Come along, please, it's time you were leaving.'

He bundled Rigby towards the door. The orange glow began to

dissipate.

'But I haven't told you about our excellent credit facilities,' Rigby

babbled.

'Not today, thank you,' said the Doctor.

'The guarantee!' Rigby said. Did I mention the guarantee?'

'Thank you for calling. Bye-bye.' The Doctor gave him a final shove

and pushed him through the luminescent shield and back into the void.

The doors closed behind him and the Doctor then fell back against

them, drew his silk handkerchief from his top pocket and used it to

wipe the back of his neck.

'Good heavens,' he said with a relieved smile. 'Those fellows are remarkably persistent, aren't they?'

Zoe was utterly perplexed. 'What was all that about, Doctor?' she

asked. Was that man one of the "phantoms" that you were talking

about?'

'What, him?' said the Doctor, pointing to the closed door. He stuffed his handkerchief untidily back into his pocket. 'No, he was just a double-glazing salesman, Zoe.'

'Aye, well, what is this double-glazing stuff anyway?' Jamie asked. 'In

that wee book of his they just looked like ordinary windows to me.'

'It really doesn't matter,' the Doctor insisted. 'After all, he's gone

now.'

'Aye,' Jamie said. 'But he's left this.' He reached down to retrieve

Rigby's umbrella, which must have fallen to the floor as the Doctor had

bundled him out.

'Oh no,' the Doctor said. 'Oh well,' he added, 'he'll just have to make

do without it, won't he? Put it in the cupboard.'

The Doctor pointed to the small equipment locker that stood on

one side of the console room. Jamie crossed over, bent down to open

it then quickly took a pace back. A long, agile leg protruded horizontally from its interior; a polished shoe twisting this way and that,

snake-like, as it searched for the floor. Rigby emerged sideways like a

limbo dancer, heaved himself upright and plucked the umbrella from

Jamie's startled grasp.

'Thank you very much,' the salesman said with a smile. 'I was

wondering where I'd left it.'

'I thought we'd already asked you to leave!' the Doctor blustered

angrily.

'You did, you did,' Rigby said. 'But then it suddenly occurred to me

that you might not fully understand exactly what it is that I'm offering.'

'We understand perfectly, Mr. Rigby,' the Doctor replied bluntly. 'It

is you who seems unable to grasp the fact that we simply *don't want any*

*windows!*'

'But sir, I'm not selling windows,' Rigby said. 'I'm selling *dreams*!'

And, frankly, I'm unimpressed with your overblown sales pitch,' said

the Doctor.

'You see, I'm selling the whole package.'

'We're not interested.'

'It's all included: installation. .'

'We don't want any.'

'A full lifetime guarantee. .'

'They are of no use to us.'

'The view of your choice. .'

'I tell you,' the Doctor said, 'you are wasting your -'

'Wait a minute, Doctor,' Zoe interrupted him. She turned to Rigby.

' *What* did you just say?'

Rigby looked momentarily surprised. 'Your choice of view?'  
Rigby

ventured.

'View?' snapped the Doctor. 'What's that all about, then?  
What do

you mean by view?'

'Exactly that, sir,' Rigby said. 'You can choose whatever outlook you

wish your window to have. . Did I not mention this earlier?'

'No,' the Doctor replied. 'No, you did not.'

'When you say view,' Jamie quizzed him, 'you mean, like a picture,

yes?'

'No, I mean the actual view itself,' Rigby enthused. 'You can look

through your window and see, for instance, the Virgo Mountains on

the planet Mitak. You can watch them from sunset to sunrise. Watch

the birds wheel between the peaks in summer. See the first snows of

winter settle and soften those lofty, jagged crags.'

'Extraordinary,' said the Doctor, visibly softening. And are there

many different views to choose from?'

'Every view is tailored to each client's individual specification,' Rigby

explained, a smile lifting his moustache.

'Och, can ye no' imagine that, Doctor?' Jamie enthused. 'Think



about it, you could look out of the window any time you like and see

Culloden Moor awash with heather.'

'Or we could look out over my home city!' Zoe said. 'We could

watch as people went about their business in the street below. See the

hovercars on the highway. Oh, Doctor, wouldn't that be marvellous?'

'Yes, Zoe,' the Doctor said in a rather noncommittal way. 'I suppose

it probably would.'

'Yes,' said Rigby, 'think of the luxury of being able to look out of

your easy-to-clean, mock-Georgian style uPVC bay window any time of

the day or night and see the view of your choice - confident in the

knowledge that the frame is guaranteed against corrosion, water damage

and certain categories of terrorist assault. But anyway, you've made your

position clear. I think I've wasted quite enough of your time as it is.

Thank you very much for your hospitality.'

He crouched down and started to climb back into the locker.  
'Wait!

Wait!' the Doctor cried. He dashed forward to stop him, then stood

rubbing his hands together apologetically and looking rather sorry for

himself. 'Perhaps I've been a little harsh on you. You know, I really

would be terribly grateful if you could tell me more about these

windows of yours. .'

II

Whenever Ace got really bored she would lose herself in the corridors

of the TARDIS; just take off in some random direction to see where

she would end up. Rarely did she take the same route twice, and more

often than not she managed to discover some previously unexplored

area of the Doctor's machine - places that she suspected the Doctor

himself had long since forgotten.

For the past twenty minutes she had been investigating a network of

poky little passageways, slightly narrower than those in the rest of the

ship and with numerous twisting intersections that had Ace thoroughly

convinced she had been traipsing around in circles. Then, just when she

was beginning to think that she would be lost in this maze for ever, the

corridor brought her to a door: tall and white with a single, translucent

roundel at the top. A door, in fact, just like any other in the TARDIS,

except for the rather incongruous addition of a thick iron plate

inexpertly riveted to its surface, overlapping the frame. A thick metal

hoop fixed to the wall passed through a slot in the iron plate and was

secured by a padlock, keeping the door firmly closed.

Or at least, it would have kept it closed had Ace not been around.

Getting into places where she wasn't meant to be was second nature to

her. She viewed a locked door as an open invitation.

She stood up on tiptoe to peer through the treacle-coloured

window, but the room beyond was in darkness. She concentrated on

the padlock, rattling it impatiently. It was too large to pick, she decided,

but it wasn't going to be a problem. She reached inside her jacket, rifled

through the folds of the lining and produced a short, stubby jemmy.

'Be prepared,' she muttered. 'That's my motto.'

She wedged the jemmy behind the lock and tried to lever the whole

thing away from the door, but its ramshackle appearance was deceptive,

and the metal plate barely moved. Annoyed, Ace clamped her teeth

together and gave it a short, sharp tug. This time she felt it give slightly.

On the third attempt it came away completely and she stumbled

backwards as the padlock skittered across the floor and came to a rest

at the Doctor's feet.

He bent down and picked it up, then fixed Ace with a grim scowl.

'All right, Professor,' Ace said in embarrassment. 'I didn't see you

there.'

'No,' the Doctor replied curtly. 'Evidently.'

'I was just -'

'I could see what you were just doing,' the Doctor pre-empted her.

He turned the twisted padlock over in his hands. 'Useful things, locks,'

he mused, his voice soft. 'So many uses: keeping things in, keeping

people out.' He looked up pointedly at Ace.

'I just wanted to see what was inside,' Ace responded. It wasn't

much of an excuse but it was all she could come up with at the time.

'Did it not occur to you to ask?'

'Why, would you have told me?' Ace asked, her mood brightening

momentarily.

'No,' the Doctor replied, wiping the smile from her face. 'You know,

Ace, you've got a lot to learn about respect - for other people's privacy,

for other people's property.'

Ace looked at the door, then at the Doctor. It was rare that she saw

him angry. Rarer still that he was ever angry with her. She nervously

shifted her weight from one leg to the other. The Doctor was the only

person she knew who was able to make her feel guilty.

'It's just. .' she began with an uncomfortable shrug. 'Well, I didn't

think we had any secrets from one another.'

She waited for the Doctor to offer a reply; to deliver some kind of

an explanation, but the Time Lord just stood and looked at her in

silence.

Ace couldn't let the matter drop. 'What have you got in there,

Professor?' she pressed him. 'There aren't any skeletons in your

cupboard, are there?' She tried to lighten the mood. 'I've got it! It's your

portrait, right? It keeps getting older and older while you -'

She saw he wasn't smiling and her words tailed off into thin air.

'Nothing,' the Doctor said, quietly. 'There's nothing in there.

Nothing that will mean anything to you Ace. Why don't you go back to

the console room. We'll be landing soon.'

'Yeah,' Ace said. 'Yeah, OK then, Professor.' She started to go. 'I'm

sorry,' she added in a small voice. 'I was way out of line.'

The Doctor shook his head, offered a hand that suggested everything was all right now. 'I'll join you shortly,' he said.

Ace nodded and left him. The Doctor waited until she had gone,

then turned his attention to the door. He placed his hand against it and

paused, struggling to make a decision. Then he gently pushed it open.

It had been a long time since the Doctor had come here, and the air

was stale and musty. The room was about twice as wide as it was long

and in keeping with the architecture of the rest of the TARDIS the

walls were dappled with the familiar pattern of circular indentations.

There was nothing in here - the only feature was a large mock-Georgian

bay window in the wall opposite the door, starkly out of place.

The Doctor walked slowly towards it. Beyond the diaphanous ghost

of his reflection, the landscape outside was in twilight. The dark

silhouettes of overarching branches framed his view as he looked out

across the valley to the grassy slopes where he had played as a boy.

He used to visit this room often. He would stand and delight in his

reminiscences of home. When autumn came he saw the trees shed their

leaves, carpeting the ground in a patchwork of purple and amber and

brown, and he could almost smell the smoky air. It was then that he

had realised that it was no longer enough to just come here and watch:

he wanted to be there, to take a walk up the slope, the dew-soaked



grass brushing his feet. He wanted to climb to the top and sit and

watch the river hiss and bubble as it snaked along the valley floor. But

it was impossible, and he knew it, so he had padlocked the door and

hadn't set foot inside since.

Until now But things were different now, weren't they? He was no

longer a fugitive. There was nothing to stop him going back now. He

had simply to key in the co-ordinates for Gallifrey; the TARDIS knew

its own way home. But what was the point? The window could show

the place, but it was showing it to the man - the old, old man - not the

child who had belonged there.

The Doctor reached out and touched his fingertips to the glass. It

was cold and slightly damp with condensation. He had considered

trying to smash it in the past, but he knew that would be pointless. It

had a lifetime guarantee.

He was still clutching the broken padlock and he looked down at it

thoughtfully. He had more elaborate equipment in his workshop that

was capable of sealing this room permanently. It was time he did the

job properly, he thought, so he set off to fetch it.

Good Companions

by Peter Anghelides

THIS STORY FIRST APPEARED IN THE COLLECTION

*WOMANUSCRIPTS: 21ST CENTURY FEMALE FICTION*

(LONDON, 2041).

I thought they were friends when I first saw them - 'good companions',

as my aunt used to say. The crumpled man stood close beside the

woman's seat, with one hand placed on the shoulder of her pale-yellow

dress. Her dark hair sprayed over the headrest, and the way she looked

at me reminded me of William's Exeter first-years, their eyes appraising

me throughout the previous day's university service. But today, I could

hold this woman's gaze. I could make the kind of brief human contact

that had escaped me for so many years. Just how William had taught

me, after I'd left Shawlands. After I'd returned to the world.

The crumpled man called her Anna. As the carriage rocked to and

fro, he stared out into the rain which drove against the window. I

listened more carefully, picked out the sound of his voice from the soft

hiss of the rain and the rattle-and-thump of the track. He was giving

her detailed, almost pedantic instructions about preparing his house for

his return the following day. Eventually he plucked a fob watch from

his mustard-yellow knitted waistcoat, gave a little sigh, and moved off

down the corridor in my direction.

I looked away, embarrassed that I might be caught spying on them. I

studied my rail ticket intently, as though I'd never seen one before. But

as he moved past, and although my legs were both beneath the table,

he trod on my foot.

'My dear madam, I am too clumsy.' He peered down from his stooped height, examining my bruised instep. 'How can I make

amends?'

A decade of apologising for William's gawkinsness had drained me of

any accusation. I couldn't meet this tall stranger's gaze, my eyes darting

around in panic. 'No, no,' I could hear myself mumbling. 'It's. .that is. .'

I found myself strangely, unexpectedly fascinated by the thinning patch

of tweed at his cuffs where the material of his jacket was worn through

to the lining. Over his arm was a clumsily folded afghan coat, which

smelled faintly of patchouli. He wore two thin bracelets around one

wrist. Pinned to his grubby lapel was a battered oval brooch, and

clutched in its scratched gold was a flawless stone, as smooth and blue

as a starling's egg. The golden clasp seemed to be slightly squashed, the

filigree of interwoven leaves blurred a little, almost melted.

'Ah, yes,' said the man, unclasping the brooch. 'Of course, I should

have offered first.' His pale green eyes held me as he gazed through his

ragged ginger fringe.

'Oh no,' I said, embarrassed and confused by his strange offer.

He took my left hand. The gold of the brooch felt warm in my palm

when he folded my fingers over it. 'I insist.'

I'd hardly realised the train had stopped at Bidbridge. Within

moments, I could see the untidy man running across the rainswept

platform, dragging the afghan over his shoulders.

'Is your foot OK?' The dark-haired woman had moved down the

carriage to sit opposite me. She peered at the mark on my stockinged

foot. 'Sorry about him. His mind is always elsewhere. Some other place,

some other time. My name's Anna, by the way.' After thirty years in

England, I still struggled with accents - hers was northern, Manchester

perhaps, or Yorkshire.

I shook her outstretched hand and introduced myself, worried that

my hesitation implied indifference.

'Haybourne?' she said. 'Sounds very English. But your accent

suggests. .New Zealand?'

'Australia. But I've lived here so long I've gone native.'

'Sorry,' said Anna, with a frown of embarrassment. 'And sorry about

your foot, too.'

'No worries,' I said. 'It's fine. I'm sure it was an accident.'

Anna said: 'Usually is, with the doctor.'

I suppose I must have dropped the brooch, because it clattered

across the formica table-top. 'The Doctor?' I breathed.

Anna had a slightly panicked look. 'Dr Smith,' she said. 'I should

have explained, Mrs Haybourne, I'm.. ' She passed the brooch back.

'I'm his London housekeeper.'

'Where has he gone?'

She thought for a moment. 'Business, he told me.' There was another awkward pause, after which she said, 'I like your dress. Are you going somewhere special?'

I fastened Dr Smith's brooch to the cool black material. 'I haven't

changed since the funeral. My husband.' I added, as though it had just

occurred to me.

I saw the embarrassed frown again. 'This muffled sound you hear,

Mrs Haybourne, is because I'm talking with my mouth full of foot.'

'Spit out those toes,' I said, trying out my first smile of the day. 'And

stop calling me Mrs Haybourne. You sound like that crowd of stiffs I

just left back in Exeter. Call me Tegan.'

*'Womanuscripts,' said the Doctor. He studied the white and red lettering on the*

*book's black spine. 'So, what am I supposed to be looking at?'*

*"Good Companions", by Tegan Haybourne. I found it by accident when I*

*was looking in the library for something else. This would have been useful a few*

*weeks ago.' She threw her chin out accusingly. 'Did you know it was there, Doctor?'*

*He propped the book on the central console, where it promptly fell down against*

*a row of brass switch-hooks. A klaxon sounded deep in the TARDIS, and a pair*

*of marquetry shutters closed across the main entrance. He clucked with irritation*

*and flicked the switch-hooks back with a brusque movement.*

*His companion jumped as the shutters rattled and vanished again. 'Doctor, if*

*you had that book all along. .'*

*'Why, what does it say?'*

*She realised she didn't know. By the time she'd thought of a suitably cutting*

*reply, the Doctor had loped out of the console room.*

*Anna found her page, and continued reading.*



William had worked in Exeter for more than a decade, but I'd known

few of his colleagues. I hadn't even known the vicar at the funeral

service. In the staff club afterwards, the only person I'd recognised was

the department secretary, and that was only from her phone messages:

'Dr Haybourne sends his apologies, but he will be delayed again this

evening.'

'Sorry to disturb your weekend, could Dr Haybourne spare an hour

or two for Head of Department?'

'Dr Haybourne fell ill during one of his lectures, and has been taken

to the General Hospital by ambulance.'

And yet, although I'd never met Anna before, I could talk to her as

though I'd known her my whole life. I could tell her how I feared

returning to Cambridge after William's death. How I dreaded the lonely

house awaiting me there, the house we had only just bought after

William's appointment to the new chair at St Cedd's. The house which

now would never be our home.

We also talked about what we liked: the theatre and art galleries. I

told her about my painting, my writing class and the stories I'd

published; I didn't tell her how my newly discovered creativity had

developed from my therapy, from my time in Shawlands. Instead, we

talked about our shared dislikes: south coast weather, airport

paperbacks, and what had happened to the railways since re-

nationalisation.

'I have to go by train,' I said. 'Old biddies like me have no choice,

now that any boy racer can fling a ton of metal down the motorway like

a rat down a pipe and call it "driving".'

We were standing on King's Cross station, trying to read the main

display board to locate my connecting train up to Cambridge. The

monsoon rain continued to rattle down on the arched roof high above

us. 'How old is Dr Smith?' I asked. 'He can't be much older than you.

And you can't be more than. .forty?'

'Looks can be deceptive.' Anna said. 'I still can't believe you're - how

old did you say, seventy-three?' She pointed to the Departures board.

'Cambridge train's cancelled,' she observed. 'Well, you can't stay here.

Come on back to the. .house with me.' She had picked up my small

case, and was already moving off towards the taxis.

I hurried after her. 'Shouldn't we consult Dr Smith?'

'No need, we've got room to spare,' she grinned. An electric taxi

sprayed to a stop at the kerb. 'You'd swear the place couldn't possibly

contain so many rooms.'

London seemed busier than ever. Even in the driving rain, more buses

loomed, more brash car horns sounded, more angry pedestrians

scurried between the traffic than I had remembered. Our  
surly taxi

driver barely grunted throughout the whole journey, so I  
wasn't too

sorry that Anna refused to let me pay the fare.

As the taxi rattled away, we scurried into the shelter of a  
huge

forked elm, which rose slightly crooked from a square of  
earth, the

pavement around it raised and cracked by the tree's roots.  
The late

summer evening's light was fading. I peered past a nearby  
crumbling

archway, and could see a substantial Edwardian town house  
through

the rain. Its windows were dark, and its red brick was coldly  
illuminated

by the sagging, saffron-yellow half-moon. We ran through  
the arch, and

into the shelter of the house.

To my surprise, the hallway was already illuminated by a  
weighty

chandelier. The large square room was bordered by heavy,  
dark oak

furniture. A broad flight of stairs, bordered by banisters with turned

wooden spindles, rose to the first floor.

Anna eased me out of my overcoat, hung it on a hatstand and

ushered me into a long, cavernous library with shelves twice my height.

There were lit candles all around, on tables, on the mantelpiece, on the

heavy dark sideboard by the tall windows.

At the end of the room were two carved oak doors. Anna had stopped in front of these. 'Tegan, I have to check some things. Get

yourself warm by the fire.' She pushed lightly on one door, and it

swung easily ajar with a low creak. She slipped through swiftly, and the

door closed behind her.

I approached the oak doors, wondering if I should follow Anna. I

tried the handle, but the door remained firmly closed. I hadn't heard

her lock it behind her.

I looked into the grate. Orange flames danced in an odd, regular

movement above the glowing coals. I wondered who had made the fire

before we returned, who had lit the candles. The owner, perhaps? But

he had left the train ahead of us, and the hall hatstand had been empty.

The room was in a chaos of scattered papers, forgotten piles of

books, and furniture in random positions. At awkward angles by the

window were several busts, each of the same person - an old man with

a bushy beard and a severe expression, so that he looked like a grumpy

Father Christmas. Only the library shelves showed any sign of order,

each book butted tidily to the edge. I chose a book at random, and the

spine read: Sir Richard Steele, *The Funeral*. When I picked out the next

title along, I was disappointed to discover that the library was not

organised at all - this second book was Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*. I

lifted a pile of loose papers from a nearby chair, dusted the seat

cushion, and sat down to leaf through the slim volume.

I could remember first reading Whitman when I was a schoolgirl.

My favourite had been ' *Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking*'. What was it

my teacher had said about the poem? Something about bird-song.

Strange that I could remember some things so clearly, yet other parts of

my life were an unread chapter to me. My Aunt Vanessa used to joke

that she could remember every gift she received for her twenty-first

birthday, but not what she'd had for breakfast that day. Strange that I

could remember that about her too, but not when I had last seen her.

That must have been when I was twenty-one. Half a century ago.

A clock rang distantly from the next room but, when I checked my

watch, I noticed that the chimes were wrong. A pair of finger-cymbals

lay on the table and I tapped them together experimentally.  
Their

tinkling sound softly filled the large, still room. I breathed in,  
half-

expecting the dust to catch in my nose, but recognised  
instead a

background smell, the heavy perfume of patchouli.

The Doctor?

No, I was still alone in the room. Why had I thought the  
untidy man

on the train might be him? The Doctor, the man I had  
invented more

than four decades ago. Before I was married. Before  
Shawlands, of

course. Too much of my earlier life read to me like a poor  
transcription,

passages unclear, pages torn or missing. In Smith's library  
now, I closed

my eyes and tried to recall my fictional Doctor. He would  
have to be

my age now, wouldn't he? I imagined his long blond hair  
turned grey,

his young face lined, his blue eyes rheumy and faded.

I started to imagine how the mess around me could simply  
echo the



creative disorder of the Doctor's work, that perhaps he'd need this

scattered array of objects around him to feel comfortable doing. . doing

whatever he did. What was that, I wondered. What *had* it been? Why

was I starting to believe that Smith could be my Doctor reincarnated?

My fiction made flesh.

I carried the slim Whitman volume back to my table and sat down

again. Across the table, I spotted a small pile of mail. One envelope

had already been opened, and I discovered that it contained a handbill

for a play, illustrated with what looked like a stylised wheelchair. The

other correspondence was unopened. I slipped a perished rubber band

from around it, and counted seven handwritten envelopes, each with a

different value of stamp. Some of the frankings were blurred, but at

least two were more than a year old. Another had next year's date

misprinted on it. They were all addressed to 'Dr J. Smith'.  
The oak door

creaked open, and I leapt up like a guilty schoolgirl. Anna  
had returned,

and I was still holding the letters. 'I.. was reading while  
waiting, and

found these on the table.'

Anna closed the door behind her and came to take the  
letters from

me. 'I'm afraid I haven't been here for several weeks, so the  
place has

rather gone to seed. Are your shoes dry yet?'

I looked at my feet, surprised to find no evidence of the  
earlier

downpour. 'Nice warm fire,' I said aloud. 'Did Dr Smith light it  
before

we returned?'

Anna shook her head, but smiled at me as though she had a  
secret.

'I never know *when* he'll be here. Recently, I don't think he's  
known

either. Business,' she added.

'He reminds me of some character from long ago. He was a  
doctor

too. What business is Dr Smith in?'

'Risk management.' Anna shuffled across to stand in front of the

fire, and arranged the small pile of letters on the mantelpiece. 'I'll show

you to your room, Tegan. And then, perhaps we can go out. The

weather seems to be lifting at last.'

Since the rain had eased off, we decided to walk. Anna had changed her

yellow dress for a cream blouse with a wide collar, and a dark suit. She

explained that Dr Smith knew I was interested in the theatre and had

suggested we go to a nearby venue to see a play by a visiting company.

It was only later that I realised this meant she had spoken to Smith

since we had arrived at the house.

We walked through wet side roads, staying on pavements well lit by

orange streetlamps or by the yellow moon. Anna walked slowly, to

allow my old legs to keep up with her, and we were careful not to get

too close to the fluttering of the spray from passing hover vehicles.

'He particularly recommended this production,' Anna explained. 'It's

described as "an intimate theatrical venue". I think that means "small".'

'Does Dr Smith work in the theatre?'

'Not that I've noticed,' said Anna. 'Though he claims some involvement in a couple of Shakespearean productions.'

Our destination, I soon discovered, was the Loft Theatre, where a

visiting group called 'The Sigrarnon Troupe' were performing one of

their own pieces, 'New Tenants'. It was only when I saw the small

poster pasted on a nearby lamppost that I recognised the same stylised

wheelchair design from the handbill in Dr Smith's library. I wondered

why, if he'd received a personal invitation, he hadn't come along this

evening.

The Loft Theatre was appropriately named, because it turned out to

be a long attic room above a large pub. At the far end was a stage area,

curtained off from several straggling rows of plastic chairs. Apart from

Anna and me, there were only three people in the audience. The sounds

of the pub filtered up through the patched grey linoleum, a low hum of

noise and the occasional shout of laughter.

Ten minutes later than advertised, the stage lights came up. Within

minutes there were more people on stage than in the audience.

I struggled to understand the play. Its tone was decidedly

pessimistic. The dialogue was largely pointless, and the plot mostly

irrational. The cast of six whirled and danced about the stage and, as

each scene progressed, each character ended up in a wheelchair,

chittering away to the others in high-pitched gibberish. Eventually, only

the tall lead actor was unaffected, surrounded by the chair-bound

figures.

There was a dream-like quality to the performance until,  
with a

dramatic lighting change, the mood changed to nightmare.  
The circling

figures became more mechanical, more robotic, except for  
their faces,

which stayed human, although distorted, leering, awful.

'I think it's Absurd,' I whispered to Anna.

'It's worse than that,' she replied.

'No, I mean Theatre of the Absurd. It reminds me of a play  
we

studied at school. Our teacher said it was once an off-  
Broadway

production.'

'Any good?'

'No, it stank. We told him it was a "gone-off Broadway" show.  
He

gave us all Ds, I think.'

In the corner of the stage, a figure - until then unseen -  
slowly grew

and grew, chirruping away meaninglessly to the wheelchair  
figures. In a

bizarre conclusion, this figure's distended body expanded  
wildly like a

rapidly inflating balloon, shooting the actor's bloated red face up into

the rafters. The chair-bound characters closed in on the lead actor as

the stage was plunged into darkness. When the house lights went up,

the actors were standing on top of the empty front row of seats, hands

linked, bowing solemnly. We applauded in embarrassment.

The three other audience members collected their possessions and

swiftly left the room, clattering down the steps at the rear. Anna was

helping me to my feet when I heard a voice from the stage area.

'Thanks for coming,' said the lead actor. 'Perhaps we can buy you

both a drink?'

We took a large table at the rear of the downstairs bar, away from a

noisy crowd of customers who were partying hard. Anna ordered

several bottles of Beaujolais. It was headier than I'd expected.

The lead actor was a strikingly good-looking young man of about

thirty. His mates, three men and two women, seemed to be the same

age. The low lighting of the pub made it difficult to be sure, but I got

the impression they could all be related; all had the same healthy tan

and mousy brown hair - even similar body language, from the way they

handled their glasses to their unnervingly bold gaze.

At first, Anna had thought it very amusing that the audience were

entertaining the cast. After only a few minutes, however, her manner

changed. I could sense this more than I could understand it. Maybe it

was the way she nervously fingered the collar of her blouse, like she was

searching for something that wasn't there. Or maybe it was the way I

felt excluded from her conversation with the actors, just like the times

when William had talked university politics with his academic



colleagues, speaking English but using words that made as little sense to

me as the dialogue in the play.

Right in the middle of something the lead actor was saying, Anna

blurted out: 'I think we have to be going now.'

'So soon?' said the actor. 'Not quite what you were expecting?'

Anna stood up, tugging on her smart jacket. 'A bit sooner than I

thought. Excuse us.'

Two of the women had also got up. 'We thought we'd surprise you,'

said the nearest, and I recognised her face - she had played the

character who had ballooned up at the end of the show.

'You know we need you,' said the lead actor.

Anna nodded towards the crowded main section of the pub. 'We're

going to walk out now, through all these people.'

'We'll meet again,' said the actor. He lifted his head, and inhaled

sharply through his nose, as though he were breathing sea air instead of

the smoky atmosphere of a London pub. 'We sense your temporal trail.

Its odour clings to you.'

The other actors were sniffing too. 'Like the stench of decay,' said

one of the women in a soft voice.

Now I had got up too. 'Charmed, I'm sure,' I said.

The actors stared at me. I could feel my face flushing, my heart

racing, a cocktail of adrenalin and Beaujolais. I saw now what was so

disconcerting about their gaze. When someone talks to you, you can

usually see their eyes flicking backwards and forward, looking at each of

your eyes in turn; these actors gazed straight at you, their eyes

unmoving.

I pulled my coat around my shoulders, shivering despite the warmth

of the pub. 'My friend's right, we've got to go. Thanks for a night to

forget.'

We pushed past the women, through the boisterous partygoers in

the other bar, and out on to the wet pavement. The cold night air stung

my cheeks.

Anna went off at a brisk pace, fumbling in her bag as she strode

away. When I'd caught up at the first corner, she brought out an old-

fashioned key.

'Front door key,' she said. 'You'll need it to get in.'

'What about you?'

'I'll use the back. They're bound to follow me.'

I held her arm. 'Are you worried about that weird guy? He was

hitting on you, I guess.'

'More than you can imagine,' Anna said.

'Well, "Not quite what you were expecting" isn't much of a pick-up

line.' I gave a little laugh. 'And I didn't fancy mine much.'

She didn't smile back. 'Go on ahead. I'll let them follow me.'

'No! We should stay together. If those creeps are after you, we

should get help.'

Anna pushed me forward with a small, urgent motion. 'I don't think

so. Go on!' She turned, crossed the street, and walked smartly away.

I admit, I panicked for a moment. My mind whirled through the

possibilities: Anna running off and abandoning me in a strange part of

London; me wandering lost in unfamiliar streets; the threat of rain and

darkness and the unknown.

Then a cloud moved, and I saw the swollen yellow half-moon, and I

suddenly knew this road after all, this low brick wall, that next junction.

There was the forked elm, leaning drunkenly in the pavement beneath

the streetlight.

The lights were on again when I slipped into the hallway. I thought

about bolting the door, hesitating in case this meant Smith would be

locked out too. My temptation to explore the empty house was

balanced by my fear that Anna would spot me if she returned home

quickly. I decided to go into the library, anyway. A figure glared at me

from the window and I stifled a cry. It was just one of the busts of the

bearded man, oddly illuminated by the sputtering candles. At the end of

the room, the carved oak doors were closed. I tried the handles, but

neither door would open. I couldn't see a lock, or any light from the

room beyond.

So I went back to the library table, threading my way between the

clutter of furniture and other objects, and sat down. As soon as I did,

my whole body eased and relaxed, as though it had only just discovered

how tired it felt. The Whitman volume was on the table in front of me.

I settled into the comfortable chair and read for a while, but I was soon

asleep.

I was in a cold room, its expanse of dusty concrete floor  
littered with

metal fragments and bullet casings scattered between the  
support

pillars. Two figures stood by a tall opening in the far wall, a  
loading bay

doorway leading out to the street. The figures had their  
backs to me,

awkwardly angled, still as statues, staring out over  
Docklands. One

wore a beige coat, his long blond hair touching the collar.  
The other

wore a dark suit, and had short-cut grey hair. The two were  
talking, but

I couldn't make out their words.

The figure with the beige coat placed his hand on the  
shoulder of

his companion with the dark suit, a parting gesture, a sign of  
solidarity.

Then he stepped towards the loading bay, and out into the  
night. Far

away, Big Ben was starting to chime the hour: one, two,  
three. .

The dark suit turned round, and I saw it was William. He  
drew me

to him, held me close, whispered to me. 'I'm tired,' he said.

'Don't go,' I said. 'I miss you. I miss you so much. Why is it the

good people who have to die?'

'A lot of good people die every day.' He straightened, as though

preparing to go.

'Don't leave,' I said, my heart racing suddenly. 'Not like this.'

'I must, I'm sorry.'

I held him so that I could see his pale blue eyes one more time.

They were rheumy and faded. 'Brave heart,' he said

Before he walked away, he smiled his unique smile. Beyond the

warehouse, Big Ben chimed thirteen.

A clock was chiming somewhere in the house beyond the open

door. Anna was peering at me where I sat, slumped in my chair. 'Are

you OK, Tegan?'

'I guess,' I said. 'Are you. .?'

She was fiddling with something on the collar of her blouse,

adjusting it. 'I'm OK now,' she said. 'But you look whacked. Come on,

you'll be more comfortable in your own room.'

I agreed, and was making my way to the stairs when I realised what

Anna had been doing with her collar. She had been pinning a

distinctive gold brooch to it, a gold brooch with a single opalescent

blue stone in the centre. It looked new, as though she had just polished

it. 'Hey! That's mine.' I said.

Anna ushered me towards the stairs. 'No, it belongs to me. It was. .a

gift from the Doctor.'

I shook her off gently. 'No way, it's mine. He gave it to me. On the

train. He gave it to me.' The more I said it, the more I felt my face

flushing. Perhaps it was because I was tired, or maybe it was the wine,

but I felt my temper flaring.

'Up you go,' said Anna quietly, insistently.

I reached out for the brooch. 'D'you mind?'



'No!' shouted Anna, stepping back. 'I have to have it.'

'Keep the damn thing,' I retorted. 'If you'd wanted it earlier, you

could've just asked.' I hitched up my skirt, and hobbled up the stairs as

fast as I could manage, angry words choking in my throat.

I slammed my bedroom door, and sat trembling for several minutes

on the edge of my bed. I went over things in my mind, hardly able to

believe the change in Anna. She'd sounded like a kid refusing to share

one of its toys.

My breathing got steadier after my dash up the staircase, though I

could feel a headache beginning. I washed my face and hands in the

sink. While the dirty water swirled down the plughole, I slipped on my

night-dress, leaving the neck buttons unfastened as usual.

I stood before the mirror in the vanity unit and studied my troubled

reflection. My hair was long and tangled, so I combed it through, left

side and then right side, just as my mum had taught me.  
Back then my

hair had been curled and strong, and red as a sunrise. At  
sixty, I'd

allowed the colour to grow out, so now it was grey as a  
winter's day, as

grey as my mum's had been when I was a child. There were  
strange

tears on my cheeks now, the first time I had cried since  
before the

funeral.

While searching for a tissue in my pile of clothing, I saw  
something

shining on my folded black dress. It was the brooch that  
Smith had

given me. Anna hadn't stolen it; hers was different, newer,  
not as

scuffed as mine. Perhaps they'd once been a pair.

I knew at once that I had to go and apologise. I unpinned the  
brooch and walked out of the room.

The moon was visible through a high casement window and  
threw

odd shadows across the upper landing. I could hear noises at  
the front

door, a clattering sound like someone was coming in, though I couldn't

see whether it was just Anna locking up. If Smith was returning, I

decided, I'd save my apology for the next day. I stole across the

polished floorboards of the landing in my bare feet, gliding, silent,

avoiding the moonbeams, blending myself with the shadows. The

clattering sound downstairs became a crash, and the front door burst

open.

It was the Sigrarnon lead actor, filling the door frame. He swooped

into the hallway. Anna had rushed to see what was happening, but now

fell back again into the library, trying to slam that door in his face. Then

the other actors swarmed in behind their leader, and Anna could no

longer hold them back.

My pulse thumped in my head as I crept barefoot down the

staircase. Through the wooden banisters, I could see the actors pushing

aside furniture, overturning objects and spilling candlewax as they

pursued Anna. I risked a look through the angle of the library door.

Five of the actors had surrounded Anna, chanting at her in a mysterious tongue. The sixth Sigrarnon, a woman, stood in the corner

of the room, near to the locked oak doors.

And then their bodies started to change. Their movements became

more mechanical, almost robotic, and their limbs seemed to harden in

the room's dim light. Their faces were transforming too, becoming

twisted parodies of humanity, the features smeared, distorted, horrible.

The sixth Sigrarnon had raised her face to the ceiling, her neck

pushed back almost at a right angle to her chest. At first, it seemed as

though she was moving closer, but then I saw that she was growing

larger, filling the corner of the room like an expanding balloon. Her

twisted face was beatific, like an unholy medium  
channelling the other

world, her voice crying out in a throbbing, exalting shriek.

I choked back my own wail of fear and horror. The other  
actors had

taken up the repulsive chorus, their stiff limbs reaching out  
towards

Anna. But she stood, her eyes closed, her face serene,  
clutching a small

golden object between her outstretched fingers. It was the  
brooch, its

blue stone shining with an ethereal light. An impossible  
sound issued

from it and the air around her began to shimmer, distort.

'Anna!' I called to her, powerless.

All the Sigrarnons turned to face me. Even the huge bloated  
creature

in the corner snapped its gaze towards me, and my whole  
body froze

like ice. They barely broke the tone of their howling chant,  
but I felt it

directed now against me. I struggled to bring my arms up to  
my

throbbing head and was almost blinded by something.

It was my own brooch, glowing like a light bulb in my hand, except

that there was no heat, no burning sensation. I stepped into the library.

My brooch flickered along with Anna's, emitting a low, booming

vibration quite incongruous with its size. Anna's brooch sounded back.

A thousand warbling echoes filled the tall room and the Sigrarnon

chant faltered.

Anna had opened her eyes now and her whole face was alive with a

huge smile.

There was a monstrous sucking sound from the corner of the room.

The huge Sigrarnon obscenity had folded in on itself, the head

tumbling into its distended stomach mass. The air around the other

Sigrarnons seemed to swim, like a heat haze on a summer road. Then

the Sigrarnons all gave a shrieking wail of despair and swirled into

nothing like dirty water down a plughole.

With a resounding crack, the brooch in my hand shattered into a

thousand pieces. The lights went out, my headache boomed and

boomed in my skull, and I fainted dead away.

*Anna read out a few paragraphs to the Doctor. He seemed to be half-listening. 'So,*

*where were you hiding, then?' she asked him.*

*'The Sigrarnons create short cuts in the cycles of time. I couldn't let them meet*

*me - that's what they wanted, what they needed. And I couldn't let you tel Tegan*

*what was real y happening, she would have messed things up dreadful y.'*

*'So you knew. You must have read this book.'*

*'No, it couldn't exist until we returned to the TARDIS.'*

*Anna shook her bead. 'That's a paradox.'*

*He seized her arm, and the bracelets around his wrist tinkled gently. 'The*

*Sigrarnons trade in paradox. To them its just an act, a performance - why do you*

*think they rehearsed their attack right in front of you in the theatre? They thought it*

*was amusing, that's why. What havoc they could wreak if they ever had access to a*

*Time Lord, or Time Lord technology.' He gestured at the shelving above them.*

*'Why, they'd even try to use this virtual library as a weapon, if they could.'*

*'This what?'*

*The Doctor tapped meaningful y on the open pages with his forefinger.*

I woke to the sound of Anna calling through my bedroom door. 'I've

started making breakfast,Tegan. Will you come down?'

I stared about the room, with that odd, disorienting feeling that you

get when you wake up in a strange bed. Fierce morning sun burned

through the brightly patterned curtains, dispersing the gloom of the

previous evening. I sat up and reached for my watch: 08:15.

'I'll be there in twenty minutes.' My voice sounded thick.

'OK. We'll be in the kitchen.

My clothes were in a tidy pile on a bedside chair, my case still on the



stand by the window. I went to the basin in the corner and it slowly

filled to the chugging sound of hot-water pipes. When I wiped the

steam from the mirror, I saw no sign of the troubled face from

yesterday. My night-dress was fastened right up to my neck. I couldn't

remember doing up the buttons.

But I remembered the dream. I remembered the strange

transformation of the actors, their obscure shapes, the echoes, the

sounds and sights of my old woman's imagination. It was as vivid as

the curtains in my room now, but in the stark light of morning I could

believe it had all been an illusion.

In the kitchen, Anna was serving the breakfast, mounds of hot

porridge ladled from a stout copper saucepan into large white china

bowls. A cafetiere of thick black coffee stood in the centre of the

scrubbed pine table. On the far side sat Smith, brandishing a buttery

knife and a clutch of mail in one hand, and an opened letter in the

other. They were the envelopes I had seen in the library yesterday.

'Good morning,' said Anna, placing a steaming bowl before me.

'How was your night? You were fast asleep when I finally got back. I

took the long route back, to lose our actor friends.'

'Good morning,' added Smith, without looking up. He set down the

letter and brushed crumbs from his knitted waistcoat with the free

hand. 'You seem well rested. Pleasant dreams, I trust?'

With this prompt, I decided to tell them the whole of my odd nightmare about the Sigrarnon troupe. I explained that I was a bit

embarrassed to mention the argument over the brooch.

Anna laughed, and said she didn't have a brooch like that. 'Besides,

how could I be offended by an argument in your dreams? Perhaps it

was caused by worrying about your journey back to Cambridge? Or

those oddballs with their weird play.'

'Or that Beaujolais at the theatre,' I smiled.

Anna leaned back in her chair and began to secure her long dark

hair with a tortoiseshell hairslide. I took a moment to study the kitchen,

which was filled with a wild array of antique cooking implements. On a

peg behind the kitchen door, Dr Smith's afghan coat hung alongside an

almost-shapeless brown felt hat.

I looked at Smith again, considering whether he could be the Doctor. Smith's wild ginger hair looked like he had just slept on it and,

after getting up, failed to find his comb. He'd picked up the letter again

and was reading the reverse of the page, which was written in a series of

strange symbols, possibly Greek.

'What are you a doctor of?' I asked abruptly.

He looked up, apparently amused. 'Are you asking academically, or

philosophically? Dear, oh dear, yes, that's it. I'm a Doctor of Philology.'

Anna poured a noisy cup of coffee. 'I've not heard it called that

before.'

I finished my porridge and said something about having to catch my

train. I went upstairs and packed my case. When I came back down to

say goodbye, I found Smith standing in the doorway to the library. He

presented his palm towards me and I could see he was holding my

brooch.

'You must have dropped this when you returned yesterday evening,'

he said.

I thanked him and took it from him. The distinctive scratch across

its clasp seemed brighter, less tarnished, more recent. I pinned the

brooch back on to my coat.

Smith led me into the library, where he stood silhouetted against a

tall window. On the murky glass, I could see shadows of leaves from

the trees outside. His red hair licked about his head like flames.

'Perhaps,' came his voice from somewhere in the dark shape, 'you'd

like to take a few books to read on your journey.'

I laughed and gestured at the tall bookshelves stretching all around

us. 'There are so many to choose from.'

Smith stepped forward so that I could see his smiling face. 'I'm sure

you'll find something to your taste, something relevant.' He rubbed his

hands together in anticipation. 'Ah, you can't beat walking round a *real*

library. On-line computer searches just aren't the same, are they? When

you walk around the shelves for yourself, you may not find the book

you originally wanted. But you'll find a different one. Maybe it's better.

And you'd never have gone looking for it to begin with. You know,

librarians have a phrase for that.'

'What, for finding the wrong book?'

'No, for discovering the perfect book that you were *not* looking for.

Such books are found close to the one you first wanted, so they call

them "good companions".'

I thought about his disorganised library. 'Sounds like an accident.'

'Well, a happy accident, at any rate. Serendipitous. One of my

companions taught me about that, many years ago.'

I took the Walt Whitman from the table where I had left it the previous day. 'I've already found what I'd like,' I said politely, '*Leaves of*

*Grass*'. It's got this really great poem in it, called "*Out of the Cradle*

*Endlessly Rocking*".'

'Must be the third edition,' said Smith, taking the book from me and

considering it. 'I remember that poem from when I first met

Whitman. .through his writing, I mean. It's about a man who recalls a

boyhood experience, when a mockingbird lost its mate in a storm at

sea.'I remembered now what our teacher had said to us about the poem.

'The memory of the bird's song teaches the man the meaning of death

and thus the true vocation of a poet.'

'Which is to celebrate death as merely part of the cycle of birth, life,

death and rebirth.' Smith smiled as he held out the book. 'We can't

change the past, even if we'd like to. Our past actions determine our

future. Our lives yet to come.'

'Once upon a time,' I said, 'I didn't believe in life after death. Since

William died, I'm not sure what I want to believe.'

'Perhaps you'd like something a little lighter for your journey?' Smith

had reached down a fatter volume from the nearest dusty shelf. Its

spine said it was ' *The Good Companions*. ' 'What a coincidence, eh? It's a

novel by J. B. Priestley. An amusing story about a wandering music-hall

troupe. Anna tells me that you enjoy the theatre.'

I thought that his eyes twinkled with wicked amusement.

*She found him lolling on a chaise-longue. The library shelves behind him curved*

*away down the wall and vanished into the darkness hundreds of metres away. 'Are*

*you always so generous with your books, Doctor?'*

*'This isn't a lending library. You don't get a ticket telling you when you have to*

*return your book. You can't reserve a title. The TARDIS is constantly updating*

*the catalogue, reconfiguring the sections. She knows what you've been doing recently,*

*and determines what you'll want to read in the future. It might be a related title, or*

*a suitable subject or. .'*

*'Quite the school librarian,' said Anna, unconvinced.*

*'Exactly!' he beamed back at her. 'The library gives you what you want before*

*you know you want it, and all within easy reach. A virtual library, based on the*

*principles of karma and good ergonomics.'*

*Anna snorted in disbelief. 'My parents wouldn't let me read karmic books.' She*

*looked at him thoughtfully. 'Tegan knew you, didn't she?'*



*'Is that what she says in the story?'*

I followed Smith to the front door, aware once again of the disarray in

the house, the haphazard assortment of curiosities on every available

surface. I knew I must have longed for some kind of familiarity since

William's death, some reliable point from the past to focus on while I

was alone. It was obvious now that Smith was not that point. He clearly

could not be my Doctor.

Smith carried my case to the front gate through the tangled shrubbery of the garden and loaded it into the taxi beside me. We

parted without another word, though he shook my hand solemnly,

holding it just too long, almost as though we might never meet again.

I looked through the rear window as we drew away. Smith was

standing by the archway, his battered felt hat crammed on to his head

and his hands thrust into his pockets. He watched my taxi until we had

vanished around the bend.

*'Tegan was just one of countless lives I have touched, her planet just one of many*

*worlds I have. .changed. Sometimes I feel that Fate is punishing me in my current*

*incarnation for the consequences of those earlier actions.'*

*'Fate?' grinned Anna. 'Like, you've met him?'*

*The Doctor didn't smile back. 'Fate is a constant companion on our journey*

*through the cycles of time, Anna. The wheel has turned so many times for me. I need*

*to know that my next incarnation will be happier, more virtuous, and not a step on*

*the path to evil.'*

*'Eeeevil,' teased Anna. 'You don't want to bump into him on a dark night.'*

*'I bumped into Tegan on the train, quite by chance,' said the Doctor softly.*

*'Shortly before I first met you, Anna.'*

*'But that was years ago.'*

*'Not for Tegan.'*

*Anna reopened the book.*

Traffic delayed even my short journey to the station. I missed my train

and had to wait ninety minutes for the next one. I started to read the

Priestley novel as we pulled out of King's Cross, but soon found my

mind wandering. Through the filthy glass of the train window, the

urban landscape turned into damp green countryside and the rhythm of

the track lulled me into a fitful sleep. I dreamed of William.

I could smell a distinctive, heavy fragrance and woke with a jolt. The

man opposite looked up apologetically. 'Oh dear, I didn't mean to

disturb you, madam.'

It was Smith.

'I recognised your aftershave,' I said.

'Patchouli oil,' he enthused. 'I've just discovered it. A dab on the

wrists, a little behind the ears, works wonders. Would like to try some,

Miss. .?'

'Mrs,' I said, trying to recall if I'd mentioned this to him before. 'Mrs

Tegan Haybourne. But you can still call me Tegan, Dr Smith.'

His eyes widened fractionally. 'Of course, Tegan.' He took off his

hat and placed it on the table. 'Good to see you.'

The hat seemed to be a newer version of the battered brown felt

number he had worn earlier. Wrapped around this one was a saffron-

yellow scarf with an ethnic pattern. I noticed that he wore a less

crumpled tweed suit too, and there was no afghan coat.

A long silence followed, interrupted only by the sound of the train

and a sneeze from the next carriage. I felt that Smith was studying me.

Eventually, I said: 'If I hadn't missed my train, we wouldn't have met

again.'

'Again,' said Smith pensively. 'Yes. Quite a coincidence.'

'After we met on Tuesday,' I said, 'Anna and I got to talking, and I

thought you could be someone else.'

'Anna,' said Smith. He would not hold my gaze, preferring instead to

stare out of the train window.

'Yes, between you and me, Anna's not much of a housekeeper. Is

she often away? Your place looked like it needed a thorough spring

clean.' He was looking at me blankly now. 'Oh dear, I hope I'm not

being rude.'

'No, no,' said Smith, smiling suddenly. 'Who did you think I was?'

'Someone I thought I knew, once. He never really existed. "My

impossible adventures with the Doctor", they called them when I was

at Shawlands. My vivid daydream imagination. My quack called him my

Dream Doctor.' Smith hadn't reacted to this confession. 'This was all

around the time my aunt went missing. That's where it had started to

go wrong. Or so the quack said.'

'The quack? This was the man you thought I was?'

'No, my quack in Shawlands. Not my Dream Doctor. Besides, that

was all a long time ago. He'd have to be very old by now.'

Smith was looking out of the window again, watching the hedgerows flashing by. 'I suppose he would be, this Doctor. .?'

'Dunno,' I said. 'But you reminded me of him. Perhaps that's why I

had another weird dream last night. About the Sigrarnon troupe.'

He did react to this, leaning forward, his green eyes suddenly staring

into mine. 'Tell me about the Sigrarnon troupe. It sounds fascinating.'

So I did - everything from the time I first met him on the train until

the moment my taxi pulled away from his Edwardian house. I showed

him the brooch, still attached to my overcoat, which was heaped on the

seat beside me. He listened politely throughout my story, not

interrupting, never taking his eyes off mine.

'This must all sound like the ramblings of a crazy old lady,' I

admitted. 'When you get to my age. . ' I laughed as I caught myself

saying the words. 'That's a phrase I used to hate when my Auntie

Vanessa used it. And I told myself I would never say it myself when I

was her age. I don't suppose you can ever control your future as much

as you believe.'

'Be careful what you wish for,' said Smith.

'I suppose. William once told me that some people believe their

present actions determine their future destinies in this world, in heaven,

or in hell. I hope that's true for him.'

'William?'

'You remember, in the library? I mentioned my husband.. '

'Ah, yes,' said Smith, 'it would be interesting to meet him.'

He could see he'd said the wrong thing and looked away at once, as

though embarrassed.

The jolt of the carriage coming to a halt woke me from a dreamless

sleep. The train had pulled into Cambridge station. The seat opposite

was empty again, and where Smith's hat had been on the table my

overcoat now lay, neatly arranged. When I lifted the coat, I noticed that

the brooch was missing. I searched the seat and beneath the table, and

couldn't see it anywhere. But I did find Smith's piece of saffron-

coloured silk, which he must have taken from around his hat, folded

carefully, and placed on the seat beside me. Which meant he'd probably

removed the brooch. I thought about this strange discourtesy: if he'd

wanted the piece of jewellery, why had he returned it to me earlier that

same day? I picked up the silk bandana, and studied the stars and

whorls in its ethnic pattern.

*Anna marched into the console room to confront him. 'So she did know you?'*

*'Long ago,' he said, turning away. 'In a previous life. She must have suffered*



*dreadful y when she travel ed with me. She final y chose to leave, of course. But then*

*it seems she had a breakdown.' His lowered his eyes. 'I thought she would be safe in*

*the care of her own people. But they merely. .put her into care.'*

*'Shawlands?'*

*'In the early twenty-first century, it's a wel -known convalescent home.'*

*'Did you know?'*

*'I should have. I should certainly have known that they wouldn't believe her*

*stories about our travels, especial y those awkward examples that the embarrassed*

*Earth authorities could actual y verify. So they had to convince her that they were*

*just that - just stories. They did that in Shawlands. And to my shame, I did*

*nothing.' The Doctor's voice was low, pensive. 'That was al several lifetimes ago.*

*Then, when I met her for the first time on that train, Tegan told me how she'd*

*banished the Sigrarnons, and saved your life, without real y knowing what she was*

*describing. So I took the resonating frequency generator - the brooch - from her; and*

*concocted a suitable plan.'*

*'Why didn't you tel Tegan what was happening? Why not tel her who you*

*were?'*

*'Have you finished the story?' His eyes were unreadable. 'Finish the story.'*

A few weeks later, I returned to London from Cambridge. Our lawyer

was one of William's university friends, a man called Brewster whom I'd

never met. But I needed to sign papers relating to William's estate, and

although Mr Brewster offered to handle it all by correspondence, I told

him that I preferred to deal with them in person. To be honest, I

wanted to visit Smith and Anna again, to ask him about the brooch. I

planned to use the excuse that I was returning the scarf he'd left on the

train.

The weather was cold but clear. My taxi driver, a cheerful youngster

with a pink complexion, soon found the street of Edwardian buildings.

But although he drove the length of the street twice, I couldn't identify

Smith's red-brick house. I decided to explore on foot, and paid my

driver with a generous tip.

I walked along the street, imagining the place in darkness, trying to

remember the route Anna and I had retraced from the theatre that

night. In the end, I realised that I kept coming back to the barren scrap

of wasteland at one end of the street. A forked elm stood crookedly in

the cracked flagstones.

I stood on the pavement for several minutes, studying the clumped

grass and piles of discarded rubbish, until a police hover vehicle hissed

to a halt nearby.

'Can I help you, madam?'

I smiled my crazy-old-lady smile. 'I'm sorry, officer. I was hoping to

see a house I once visited here. I think I must be mistaken.' I took a

scrap of envelope from my coat pocket, on which I'd scribbled the

address.

'I think you *are* mistaken, madam,' said the policeman kindly, and he

handed back my envelope. 'There's been no house here for years.'

THE END

*Anna wanted to throw the book at him. She contented herself by flinging it towards*

*the library shelf. 'No wonder you were in such a hurry to leave. You'd read the*

*story. You knew all along.'*

*'No,' said the Doctor sadly. He retrieved the fallen book.*

*Anna felt her face flush. 'You set me up. Even before you met me, you sneaky*

*deceitful bugger, you set me up. And Tegan, too. You lied to us both.'*

*'Oh Anna! How can you think I could simply overturn her life yet again? Start*

*her on a path that could only lead her back to Shawlands? And lead me to.. ' The*

*Doctor turned a little impatient circle in front of her;  
snatching at his wild red hair*

*in frustration. 'Al I could do was ensure that Tegan would  
receive the brooch*

*original y, and thus protect her. And protect you too. Tegan  
saved your life, you*

*know. A fine pickle you got yourself into!' He gave her a  
sulky look, then reached*

*past her and pushed the book back on the shelf. He wiped  
the dust off a peeling*

*white label, on which was written in copperplate writing:  
'Humanian Era'.*

*'You made her a brooch, too?'*

*'Same brooch, different times,' muttered the Doctor: 'When  
you activated the*

*frequency generator in yours, it created a harmonic  
resonance in its later self - the*

*brooch that Tegan had. Which banished the Sigrarnons back  
to their own*

*dimension.'*

*'Another paradox. And you took a bit of a chance while you  
were at it.'*

*He looked stung by the accusation. 'I would never put you at  
risk, Anna. We're*

*good companions too, aren't we?'*

*Anna watched him walk off stiffly, climb the staircase and vanish from sight.*

*She turned away, back to the library bookshelf faintly embarrassed and ashamed.*

*'Yeah, right.'*

*Womanuscripts was still just visible. She lifted out the book to its left,*

*glanced at it, and frowned. She angled the book in the guttering candlelight to read*

*its title properly: Carlo Goldoni, The Liar.*

Missing Part Two: Message in a Bottle

by Robert Perry and Mike Tucker

It was difficult to tell how long the bottle had been drifting. The clear

glass surface had been scoured clean by the solar winds. Light from the

distant binary system glinted off the myriad tiny slivers of ice that

tumbled alongside it like tiny crystal moons, records of an endless cycle

of freezing and thawing. A long strand of red hair, caught in the

stopper, trailed elegantly against the stars.

The paper inside was frozen and brittle, the neat  
handwriting in blue

biro nearly faded to illegibility. The promise had been made  
on another

frozen world. 'It will reach you - in time,' she had said. But  
Time had

other ideas, and the bottle had drifted, from system to  
system, from star

to star, the message inside unread.

The author has long since forgotten the words on the single  
page.

The futile act had passed into memory, a relic of another life.  
Had it

been written in a moment of whimsy, an inconsequential  
postcard from

the edge, or was it something more desperate, a cry for help  
from a

traveller stranded and alone, millions of light years from  
home?

Occasionally, on still cool nights, she stares at the sky,  
watching the

pinpricks of light, wondering if the bottle is still up there. It  
is, but its

journey is nearly over now. It has been caught up in the  
stream of

matter drawn inexorably across the void to the swirl of  
stellar debris

that outlines a black hole. It will take centuries to get there,  
but its fate

is sealed. There is no escape. Its journey will end with the  
crushing

nothingness of the singularity, passing over the event  
horizon into

oblivion, its message undelivered.

As the bottle begins to tumble gently a shape is reflected in  
its

surface. Just for a second, if you had been watching, a large  
blue box,

the light on its roof glinting like the distant suns, would have  
been

visible in the glass, but only for a second. Just as quickly it  
would have

faded, travelling on, unaware of the letter from a friend.  
Unaware of the

message in a bottle.

Femme Fatale

by Paul Magrs

Before lunch, in Chelsea. It's 1968 again. The sun is bright  
on white



buildings. He thinks about taking a walk down the King's Road. He's

immaculate. He shoots his cuffs, swings his brolly round. He parries,

thrusts, pretends he's fencing. The Doctor is ready for action. He tips

his bowler hat rakishly. Like I said, immaculate.

He wonders if he might pop across to Paris this weekend. This is

well before the Eurostar or any of that nonsense. But he can be there

in a flash.

Maybe Mrs Jones will condescend to come with him.

Not that he's seen anything of Mrs Jones since that nasty affair with

the brutish clones in that rundown mansion in Tunbridge Wells.

He deserves a weekend away, at least. And so does Mrs Jones. If he

gives her a ring now, she can start packing.

He crosses his fingers. Don't let Mother phone. No silly business for

a week or so. He rolls his eyes, remembering how much Alistair hates

to be called Mother.

And of course the phone rings.

'Yes? Hello?'

Business as usual. 'Some pop artist chap has been shot and nearly

killed. You know the one. Weedy little feller.'

'Hardly my department, Alistair.'

'We suspect foul play, Doctor. Of a particular sort.'

'I see. Shall I ring Mrs Jones?'

'It would save me a job.'

Alistair's such a lazy old devil. The Doctor straightens a couple of

paintings around his flat, deep in thought, before turning to the phone

and dialling her number.

Lunch in a diner round the corner. Back at the Factory nobody ate

anything other than candy. I could never neglect myself like that. They

took a load of pills and carried on sitting around, watching the light

show, watching everyone who came in and bitching. I wanted fries and

I wanted a quarter-pounder and a milkshake. I came and sat in a booth

and took a breather. Quite honestly, I was trying to catch up with

myself. I was shocked and excited by the Doctor's sudden arrival, but I

was also mortally offended that he hadn't spared me the slightest of

glances or gathered me up in a warm reunion hug. I was suspicious.

This was the way I was thinking when Valerie turned up. She looked

her usual filthy self. Her hair was matted and fluffed up in places and

she wore that stupid hat. She was dressing in the dowdiest clothes

again. For a while she'd been dressing better, when her drag queen pal

helped her to glamorize herself for her meetings with her new

publisher. But things had turned sour for Valerie again and she'd let

herself go. Poor girl. She was so confused.

'Hey,' she said, sliding into my booth. 'What's up?'

She had an armful of those hand-printed manifestos again. I met

Valerie on the street about two years before, when I'd first come to the

city. She sold me a ratty copy of her opus for a dollar. She was amazed

when I bought it and read it and it made me laugh. It was a manifesto

for doing away with all the men in the world and the women taking

over. She had some scheme to replace men with clones, without

personalities. Just enough of them left to fulfil various procreative

functions for those women who wished to dabble in such things. Next

time I saw her, I told her it was a fantastic idea. We got a little drunk in

the room she'd taken in the Chelsea Hotel and talked into the early

hours and I'd talked too much, and told her about the planets I'd been

to where women really were the rulers and men were banished. She

thought I was stoned. Sometimes, though, she liked hearing about my

trips to other planets, yet I could see she was taking it all with a pinch

of salt. This was the life I was in now - when someone as mad as

Valerie looked at me sceptically, whatever I said.

'You got it all wrong, Iris.'

They were having lunch in Paris in 1934. Iris looked slightly

different again. Tighter around the eyes and mouth, as if she'd recently

had surgery. Sam wondered how long it had been since they had met.

Did I, Sam, dear?'

'The way you wrote it. About the Warhol shooting.'

Iris fiddled with her salad. 'I'm sure the Doctor would say that. I'm

sure he would object to any number of things I say in my book. 'You'd

be right. But, for now, the most important thing is what you say about

Warhol. That we tried to save him. That's the most damaging part,

according to the Doctor.'

'Because you were both interfering in the messy fabric of time?'

'Something like that'

'You know I don't give two hoots about stuff like that.'

'I know.' Sam rallied. 'But you were wrong. It wasn't like that. We

weren't trying to save him. He had to be shot. I knew that. I know

better than trying to change things for the better. We all do.'

'Well, forgive me for being so presumptuous.' Iris was eyeing the

waiter, who hovered beside their table. 'What exactly were you up to?'

I was sitting with the usual afternoon crowd. The usual hangers-on. A

rabble of druggies and stars and drag queens. We were just kind of

chatting away, waiting to shoot the afternoon movie. Someone said they

were bringing a horse into the Factory. It was going to be a cowboy

movie and that sounded cool to us. Someone else said there was a party

on that night and some famous people were coming. We'd recognise

them when they came in. We nodded and decided we'd wait and see.

You spoke up then. You came round to face us all on the couch.

'Hello, everyone. There was no one at the door, so we just walked in.'

The star on my left - a tall skinny fella in black jeans and Ray-Bans, I

forget his name - shrugged.

'We were looking for Andy.'

Caroline, the girl on the scatter cushion on the floor, said, 'He's in a

meeting. He's painting. He's shooting a movie.'

'All at once?' Sam asked.

'He's a busy guy.'

'Yes, of course he is,' you said, and plunged your hands into your

oh-so-capacious pockets.

As I pressed the button that would take us to the upstairs office, she

stared at me. I feigned all innocence as she said to you, 'Doctor, I think

that's...'

You shushed her. 'Not now, Sam. I'm thinking. And lifts always

make me nauseous.'

'But. .'

You went green about the gills then. Ridiculous, Doctor, to get so

funny about lifts when you spend your time haring about like you do.

Anyway, the lift stopped and there we were on the office floor.

Plate-glass windows, a whole wall of them. Desks with heaps of

papers and magazines. Chic-looking ladies and pretty boys handling the

phones, many of them actors just paid to look busy. Sprays of lilies in

glass bowls.

'I can't promise he'll actually see you,' I warned.

You waved me away. 'That's all right. Thanks for your help.'

I watched you stalk determinedly towards the studio. Sam was at

your heels, giving me only the quickest of backward glances.

She rings the doorbell of his Chelsea flat. She's always very proper.



When he opens the door she's leaning casually against the frame. He

raises an eyebrow. She's in a black catsuit again. Work clothes.

'I was hoping to get off this weekend, Doctor.' She marches in.

'My thought exactly, Mrs Jones. Something's cropped up.'

'Mm.' She flings herself down on his velvet couch. From her handbag she produces a paperback book. 'I've found something you

might be interested in.'

'I don't get much time for reading these days,' he sighs. 'More's

the pity.'

But he takes the book. *Wildthyme*.

'It's just been published by the Olympia Press in Paris. It purports to

be a collaborative time travel novel by three authors separated by

hundreds of years. The Marquis de Sade, Gustave Flaubert and

Gertrude Stein.'

'The Olympia Press? Really, Mrs Jones, I'm surprised you read

risqu  books.'

She shrugs carelessly. 'This one claims to be all about you. And me.'

He opens the book. 'I can skim it on the way.'

'On the way where?'

'New York. Then Paris'

'Well. The days are just packed, aren't they?'

'Oh,' I said. 'I got sick of hanging round that place. They were just

making another movie. Some kind of cowboy thing. They had a real

horse.'

'That's cruel to animals,' Valerie said. 'They'll probably kill it and

that'll be, like, art.'

'I hope not,' I said frostily, my accent slipping. 'How's your book

coming along?'

Valerie's face darkened. 'I'm not writing it. I've given up, Iris. That

contract he made me sign ripped me off. I wasn't getting anything out

of it.'

'But you said he was a great publisher! He did *Ulysses*,  
*Lolita*, *Tropic of*

*Cancer...*'

All of it sexist crap,' said Valerie, rather primly. 'And he's a  
scummy

French bastard.'

'So you're not writing any more?'

'Nah. Well, yes. But not that novel. I'm still pushing my play.  
I still

want Andy to film it.'

'I don't think he uses a script, Valerie I think he just turns  
the

camera on and lets things happen.'

'Well, he should use a script. And he should use mine.'

I shrugged. 'I'm writing a book, you know,' I said.

That night at Mr Chan's you and Sam were at the special  
table in the

corner. You were sitting with the usual crowd. When I came  
in, I

suppose I was surprised you'd got yourself into the in-crowd  
so fast.

But I shouldn't have been. You always seem to get yourself  
in there.

'Gee,' Andy said, when I came up. I was in black PVC and dark

glasses. I was wearing the tallest hat in the restaurant. 'You look

fantastic tonight.'

The whole twenty-strong table turned to look at me. I had a cigarette on the end of a silver holder. I'd spent about an hour

ransacking the wardrobe on the top deck of my bus for this outfit. I

wanted it to be just right.

'Hey,' Andy said, 'why doesn't everyone move up for her? Can we

make some space? There should be some space here.'

I sat directly opposite you, and smiled, and flashed my gorgeous

gem-like eyes over my glasses.

If you really want to know the truth, this is it. This is the story of how I

almost got him shot. The man I love! Almost shot! It was 1968. We

were in New York. I'd been there a year or two already, hanging around

the fringe art scene, getting into art movies, getting seen  
round and

about, getting to know people. It was a heavy scene. It was a  
great

scene. I kept off the pills, didn't inject a thing. I was drinking  
like a fish,

but that's just me.

And besides, I was in a different body then. This was Iris  
Mark Six

and, in the process of adopting this heavenly new bod, a  
whole new life

to use and abuse had opened up for me. I has masses of  
honey-gold

hair, jade cat-like eyes to die for and the slinkiest body  
imaginable. I

wore bikinis and spangly catsuits to show it to best  
advantage. Well, the

assorted freaks I was hanging around with thought I was  
fantastic.

Especially when I dropped into the Factory. For the first time  
in ages, I

felt like I was settling down somewhere. After my  
regeneration - a

rather hasty, nail-biting affair on the hectic and magical  
world of

Hyspero - I thought I deserved a little time in one place to get myself

together. I thought I'd have another bash at the 1960s; in a different

city this time. The last time around I'd been in Paris and hadn't seen

much action. For my new self, I settled upon New York and this time I

would definitely make the in-crowd.

The Doctor took us off to an Italian place for lunch. While he was in

the Gents, Sam looked at me and her eyes flashed. 'Did you see? He

almost did it! He almost changed things! When it came down to it, he

still tried to jump in and change history!'

'Oh, Sam,' I shook my head. 'You don't know how much that will

have shaken him up.'

'There's all sorts of things we could change. .' Sam said.

The Doctor came back. 'Their carbonara is excellent, apparently.'

Then he turned to Sam. 'You want to know why we change things on

other planets, overturn regimes, thwart invasions and so on, and when

it comes to Earth we have to be terribly careful not to change anything?

' She nodded. 'That's right.'

'Well,' he said, 'the truth is, Sam, that. .' He looked up then, over his

menu, to check that I would back him up. 'Iris?'

But I had already gone.

'See?' Andy was saying lazily. 'He recognises you. You must be famous

already, honey, and you haven't been in a movie yet.' Andy turned to

talk to some of the others beside him then. I was left with the Doctor

and Sam staring at me. I rolled down my Audrey Hepburn gloves and

peeled them off, one finger at a time.

'I know it was you!' Sam yelled, jumping up and grabbing me in a

hug. That blew my cool straight away. The Doctor didn't look so

pleased.

'What do you think you're doing here?'

'Just hanging around, having fun. Seeing art.'

He scowled at me.

They drove to the airport in Mrs Jones's vintage roadster, Bessie.

Mother had been as good as his word and arranged the private jet. It

was thrumming ready for them on the airstrip, where the wind whipped

violently and various Ministry men were waiting.

'Benton,' he said 'Good to see you.'

Benton was silent.

As they boarded and readied for take-off, the Doctor asked Mrs

Jones, 'Who would want to write a book about us?'

'Who'd be able to?' she asked, with a sigh. She nodded to the

steward for champagne. 'We *are* meant to be top secret.'

'Yes, very.'

'Ah well. We'll know soon enough.'

They were quiet until they were up in the air. The Doctor, Mrs

Jones noted, was completely absorbed by the book in his hands.



'Apparently,' he said, smiling, 'we travel the universe in a space and time

vessel which is huge on the inside and disguised as a sort of police box.'

She tutted. 'If only.'

'Quite.'

'I don't think we need worry about this. It is rather fruity, though.'

'This woman, Iris,' Mrs Jones mused. 'She claims to exist. She apparently travels in a double-decker bus.'

'I'll have Mother check the files. We may have run up against her

before.'

He reached for the phone.

Sam was talking to Andy. She was thick with him. It looked like hero-

worship on both sides. I heard him say something about liking the way

she dressed like a boy, in her denim jacket and her T-shirt. Her T-shirt

had one of the Marilyn faces on it and he kept asking her where she got

that from. Sam told him Camden Town and he was none the wiser. 'I

didn't think I'd licensed any merchandise,' he said. 'Did I license any

merchandise?' He was ghostly white, even under the pink-shaded lamps

of Mr Chan's. He had his dark glasses on too, as well as his usual

leather coat and his white, synthetic, slightly lopsided wig. Suddenly he

looked at me.

'Gee, I don't think I'm being a very good host here,' he said. 'Mrs

Jones, Doctor, you haven't been introduced to my star here.'

'We met earlier,' I said. 'In the Factory.'

'Oh, sure,' Andy said. 'You already know them, Iris.'

The Doctor was swallowing a lychee, which he promptly coughed

up into a napkin. 'Iris?' he asked, looking at me darkly through his

tangle of hair. I beamed at him.

Sam lowered her voice. The Valerie who shot him that day. She was the

wrong one.'

'Oh, yes?'

'The real Valerie was here in Paris the whole time. Selling her book. The Valerie in jail in the States is a fake. A clone.'

'And who's been cloning mad women?'

'You tell me.'

I'd parked my bus in an alley at the back of the Factory.  
There was so

much weird stuff going down in this part of town that no one noticed

the completely erroneous presence of a bright red double-decker bus

apparently bound for Putney Common. My wonderful semi-transdimensional home-from-home. No one here knew that I lived

aboard it. No one apart from Valerie, who was waiting for me, looking

her usual unkempt self, when I staggered back down the alleyway tipsily

at three in the morning.

She was sitting beside the bus and she was in a hell of a mood.

You came into the Factory and stared around. You pulled a face at the

smell of drugs in the air. Oh, you're so upstanding. In came Sam,

trailing after you as always. Her hair trimmed again, looking sharp. That

morning she was in a black leather one-piece. Her style had changed

somewhat. And you were in a classic Savile Row pinstripe. What

happened to the velvet number, Doctor? You shot your cuffs and

coughed. Everyone turned to look at you.

I spoke up. 'Maybe we could go and see. Andy can talk while he

paints. He likes doing that. He says he gets lonely painting.' I got up

and wriggled my silver dress straight. I was in fantastic stack-heeled

boots. They were actually from 1973, which was naughty really - but

what the hell; we were meant to be before our time. 'Who did you say

you were?'

You grinned at me. So affable. I couldn't believe you still hadn't

recognised me. All right, so the only time you'd seen my new

incarnation was on a video I'd sent you to assure you I was alive and

well, but the least you could have done was remembered my new face,

perfect and heart-shaped as it was. But nothing. Not a glimmer of

recognition. You said, 'Thank you very much indeed. I am known to

those in the know as the Doctor and this is Mrs Jones.'

I led you through the dusty, labyrinthine halls of the Factory. Our

voices echoed as we went. There were a few others scattered about,

moving canvases, installations, setting up cameras, lights and those

funny reflecting umbrellas. Someone was clumsily manhandling a whole

stack of painted Brillo boxes. 'You two here for a screen test?' I asked,

motioning them to follow me to the lift.

'Ahm, not exactly,' you said.

'You should,' I said. 'You've got definite potential to be a star.'

'For about fifteen minutes.' You laughed.

'For about a thousand years,' I said. The lift doors opened. 'And

your little friend looks quite foxy too.'

As we got into the lift and the doors slid to, Mrs Jones gave me one

of her stares.

'Oh, God,' said Mrs Jones. 'How I hate New York.'

They were struggling through the crowds. 'I find it all rather exhilarating,' said the Doctor.

'Roll on Paris.'

'Ah, well. There's no comparison.'

The next morning the groupies and the hangers-on in the Factory were

all talking about the movie they'd made yesterday. 'I think it's his best.

He's really transcended the low mimetic this time.'

'Gee,' I said.

The lift doors opened and Sam came out. She hurried over to me.

'Can I have a word?'

'What's up?'

'I've left the Doctor with Andy. He's showing him the silk-screen

process. That'll keep them busy.'

'You look all worked up, Sam.' Sam did too, glancing about sideways

as if something awful were about to happen.

'Yeah, well,' she said. 'I think the Doctor's going to be furious with

me.' 'This was delicious. 'Why, what have you done?'

Sam looked at me and said in a low voice, 'Iris, it's the third of June,

1968.'

'So?'

'Don't you know?'

I didn't. I really didn't.

'This is the real reason I made him bring me back. I thought if we

could get here, to this exact date, and get in the right place, then we

could prevent it happening.'

'What?' I wanted to shake her. She was worse at explaining things

than the Doctor was.

Behind us, the freaks on the sofa were catcalling someone just

coming in.

'Hey, here she comes now. Miss Lonelyhearts! How're you doing?'

A very aggressive female voice swore. We heard her rapid footfalls

across the floor of the Factory.

'You can't go up there! Andy will be angry if you disturb him!' There

was another shout as someone got in the lift and the doors shut.

Sam was saying, 'My parents told me about him. He got shot and it

nearly killed him and that spoiled his life afterwards. They told me how

great he was and.. '

I wasn't paying attention. 'I think that was Valerie passing through

just then.'

Sam went white. 'Who?'

'Valerie, this girl I know, she told me she was going to barge in and

make Andy talk to her.'

Sam sprinted off to the lift.

He worked late in the office that night. He liked the hard, satisfying



clunking of the old typewriter. Girodias had given him an office at the

top of the building, a room crammed with yellowed scripts and crates

of new copies of books waiting to be sent out. The Doctor had Iris's

book open in front of him. He was doing her proofreading for her.

He hated the idea of suppressing books. He hated the idea of

censorship. What he told himself was that he was only rewriting it.

Changing it slightly. He was only writing over the top of Iris's version,

in just the way she had. Still, as he worked through the night and

rewrote the book word for word, he was gradually erasing her

testimony.

Around dawn, when he was starting to feel tired, a thought struck

him. He could get someone else in on this. Someone only too happy to

do the work.

He packed his satchel hurriedly and rushed out of the office,  
down

the spiralling, dusty staircase, into the barely lit street.

There,

underneath the lamplight, the TARDIS was waiting.

He dashed into the calm, dusty chamber and worked busily  
at the

console, totting up figures, making arrangements. Then he  
ripped Iris's

book into three.

When the lift doors opened it was on to a very calm scene.

It was almost as if nothing was wrong. Andy was in his usual  
black

outfit and his sneakers. Not a hair on his silver wig was awry.  
He stood

by the desk with two of his assistants. The Doctor stood a  
little way

across the wide room and he looked aghast. He seemed to  
be realising

exactly what was going on.

All the men were facing the same direction. They were  
facing

Valerie, who was fishing about in a paper bag and producing  
a neat,

stubby .38.

One of the assistants told her not to do it.

She levelled the gun.

Mrs Jones started to run towards her.

I shouted, 'Sam, you can't. .'

And then the Doctor pelted forward.

Valerie fired at him. Missed.

He knocked her flat.

She fired again, the gun going off in her hand. She shot Andy once,

twice, in the chest, so that the bullets passed through his lungs and out

of his back.

I was frozen to the spot. I wasn't sure if I was more horrified by the

shooting, or that the Doctor had tried to prevent it.

Mrs Jones high-kicked the gun out of Valerie's hand. As the assistants went to help Andy, Valerie picked herself up and was about

to jump at Mrs Jones. The Doctor pushed himself between them. The

room was full of shouting. By then I'd dashed across and I whirled

Valerie around. 'Just go, Valerie. Just go.'

She left by the same lift. Shaking and talking to herself.

The Doctor stared at me, appalled.

Ten minutes later, the ambulance arrived.

It was in all the papers.

I'd parked my bus in an alley at the back of the Factory.  
There was so

much weird stuff going down in this part of town that no one noticed

the completely erroneous presence of a bright red double-decker bus

apparently bound for Putney Common. My wonderful semi-

transdimensional home-from-home. No one here knew that I lived

aboard it. No one apart from Valerie, who was waiting for me, looking

her usual unkempt self, when I staggered back down the alleyway tipsily

at three in the morning.

She was sitting beside the bus and she was in a hell of a mood.

'Have you seen Andy?'

I nodded.

'They told me he was out of the country. They wouldn't let me

anywhere near him I've been cast out.'

'I'm sure that's not true.' But I knew it was. I'd heard some of the in-

crowd talking Valerie was definitely *persona non grata* these days. She was

too stroppy, too uncool when she came round.

'He's still got my script. He won't send it back. He says he lost my

only copy and now he won't return my calls.'

'Gee, Valerie .. '

'God, now you're talking like him, Iris! Can't you see he's like a

vampire? He takes over everyone!'

'Well, why don't you barge your way in there? Why don't you go

marching in and confront him? Have it out with him. Tell him you

want your work back. He's a good fella really. .'

She set her jaw. 'Maybe that's what I'll do.'

She stalked away, brushing past me, and hurried down the alleyway.

They visited him at home. He was sitting up in bed. He was drawing

cats for Mrs Jones. He was using his old technique of drawing in ink

and then blotting it on to a clean sheet so he got a lovely dotted-line

effect. 'Gee, I haven't drawn anything by hand in the longest time.'

He signed the cat drawing and gave it to Mrs Jones. 'This is for you.

For coming to see me. Not one of those groupies and junkies at the

Factory has been up.'

Mrs Jones clutched her drawing and beamed.

'I used to have about twenty cats, when I lived with my mother,'

Andy said.

'So did I,' said the Doctor.

'Iris?' Andy asked Iris. 'Is there any news on Valerie?'

'They picked her up in the park. She walked up to a cop and said

she'd murdered you.'

'She was so confused,' he said. 'Sometimes I think these people only

hang around me when they can't face being in their own lives.'

The Doctor said, 'Mrs Jones and I should be going now. We have

appointments in Paris we really ought to keep.'

'I need to sleep. I'll see you later.'

With that, he seemed to fall asleep.

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anywhere near him I've been cast out.'

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'He's still got my script. He won't send it back. He says he lost my

only copy and now he won't return my calls,'

'Gee, Valerie .. '

'God, now you're talking like him, Iris! Can't you see he's like a

vampire? He takes over everyone!'

'Well, why don't you get out of the country? Take that ticket

Girodias offered you. Go to Paris and finish your book. Get away from

all of this, Valerie.'

She set her jaw. 'Maybe that's what I'll do.'

She stalked away, brushing past me, and hurried down the alleyway.

In between the various courses - and there were lots of them, as Andy

talked and did business and listened to everyone - I went to the Ladies,

which was spacious and pink and decorated floor to ceiling in ostrich

feathers. By the time I came out of my cubicle, Sam was sitting by the

wash basins, waiting for me.

'Hey,' I said.

'You've got an American accent,' she said.

'It's put on,' I said. 'I like to blend in.'



'You look wonderful, Iris. I never properly believed in regeneration,

until.. '

'Until you saw it happen to me.'

'I was glad you got away safely.'

'You all left me!' I cried. 'They had me in a kind of tomb!'

'We waited for you to recover. We were there the whole time, Iris.'

'You were?'

'And you only regenerated because the Doctor risked his neck going

to fetch the honey from the bees that made it and.. '

'He saved my life?' This was news to me.

'Of course!'

'I'll have to thank him.' I did a quick calculation. 'I've let two years

slip by without thanking him.'

'But it's only about four months since we were all together on

Hyspero.. '

'Relatively speaking, it's actually about eight thousand years, but it all

gets too dizzying if you think about it too much.'

Candy, one of the drag queens from Andy's gang, came tottering out

of her cubicle then. She looked us up and down. 'You guys are too

much,' she said, and turned on her three-inch heels.

'We must sound mental,' Sam laughed.

'Listen,' I said, 'why are you here?'

'I want to find out,' she said, 'if it's possible to change things for the

better.'

I pursed my lips and shook my head. 'Impossible. You'd cause a

dreadful mess. I know I look like I interfere, but you can't really. And I

can't believe the Doctor would let you.'

'He wouldn't. I've never said anything like that to him.'

'He'd be appalled. All we can be, Sam, really, is tourists. All we can

do is watch. Just. . sort of. . turn on the camera and see what happens.'

'I suppose so.'

'So how did you get him to bring you here? There aren't any

invasions to thwart or monsters on the loose.'

She looked serious. 'I badgered him. I wanted to see this time. I

wanted to see the Factory first hand. We never meet famous people

usually.'

'And he said yes?'

'He owed me one.' Sam smiled wryly. 'More than one. I always

wanted to meet Andy. My parents used to talk about him.'

'He's a laugh,' I said. 'I realised I had to come here when I was

reading this book about art and saw myself in one of the group shots at

the Factory. I was standing at the back, looking *très chic*. So I had to

come back.'

We walked back through the restaurant, towards our table.

'Is that how time travel works?' Sam asked me.

We took our places.

'It works any way you want it to, honey,' I said.

'Listen to them!' Candy sighed. 'I heard these two gossiping about

time travel in the Ladies Room!'

'Gee,' said Andy.

The Doctor was still scowling.

I got into the lift with her. She really didn't seem like the girl  
I

remembered. Far too sure of herself. Much too sophisticated.  
And

where did all that leather come from? I thought she was an  
ardent

vegetarian. Gloomily, I thought about clothes. They were  
everywhere,

of course.

The third of June, 1968, Iris,' she gabbled. The lift seemed to  
be

taking hours to reach the top. 'It's the date that Andy gets  
shot! I can't

believe you don't know the story!'

'I'd forgotten!'

'And I wanted to change it!'

'But I told you, you can't!'

She kicked the wall. 'I've gone and messed it up. I've left the  
Doctor

up there with him.. '

My hearts leapt up at that. The Doctor was in the firing line.  
And I'd

just about talked Valerie into going up there.

Fancy coming after me, you stupid man. I didn't ask you to follow me.

I wasn't looking for you. One day I was sitting on the old couch in the

Factory with some of the others and we were just hanging out, and in

you walked. I thought I was seeing things. In you breezed, blithely as

you always do. You were in your green velvet coat and your grey

cravat. You still had your brown swept-back hair. You still had that air

of boyish arrogance and charm. God, I was pleased you were still in

that body. Last time I saw you in it, I was old as the hills. I still wanted

to see you on equal terms, with me looking fantastic too. And here you

were. You have this habit of turning up even when I don't expect it.

For a little while they kept an apartment in Paris. Nothing too big,

nothing too fussy. Mrs Jones and the Doctor and, later on, Fitz went

back to it over a period of months at the end of the 1960s. Mrs Jones

got herself involved in various student uprisings. She came back one

day to tell them that she'd been throwing bricks into the barricades

alongside none other than Michel Foucault. The Doctor gave her a

hard stare.

He, meanwhile, had been calling into the offices of a certain Maurice

Girodias, a publisher.

One evening Mrs Jones returned home to the flat to find the Doctor

reading a proof manuscript, sipping from a tall frosted glass of

Chardonnay.

He looked up as she walked in. 'She's gone and done it.'

'You knew she would.'

He sighed and tossed the manuscript on the table. 'She'll cause a

great deal of bother.'

'She always does.'

'And this!' he cried, clutching a brand-new hardback, fresh from.

Girodias's Olympia Press. 'This isn't supposed to exist either.'

Mrs Jones took the book from him. ' *The Scum Manifesto*, by Valerie

Solanis.'

The Doctor put his head in his hands. 'Valerie's meant to be in jail

for shooting Warhol. She never came to Paris. She certainly didn't

publish her manifesto here.'

'So that was definitely a clone we saw shoot him?'

'It seems that way.' He flung his feet up on the table and poured

some more wine.

'Doesn't Maurice Girodias mind you taking all these books from the

office?'

He shrugged carelessly. 'I've made myself indispensable. I can type

faster than anyone he's ever seen. And I just happened to find an

exceedingly rare text by De Sade knocking about. He's publishing it in

January. *The Education of Jean-Claude*.

'You're as bad as Iris.'

'Don't say that'

Carelessly Mrs Jones had a flick through the proof copy of Iris's

book. It was called *Wildthyme: Confessions of a Time Lady*. She pulled a

face. 'This is filthy,' she said.

'Spiced up for the European market. I warned her about this. When

I found all her journals in the bus on Hyspero. It was one long

plagiarised version of my life. Now she's turned it into pornography.'

He looked disgusted. 'I don't think you ought to read it, Mrs Jones.'

It was the following week that Mother came to stay. He rang ahead,

just to make sure they weren't too busy to meet him.

'He's being sarcastic, of course,' said the Doctor.

'Of course,' sighed Mrs Jones.



They met Alistair for lunch.

Alistair sat at a table on the pavement. A pot of tea and three cups

were laid out ready for them.

'Alistair,' said the Doctor warmly.

Mother didn't stand to greet them. 'Shall I pour?'

Mrs Jones sat beside him and said coaxingly, 'Have you come to

check up on our progress?'

There were no preliminaries. I'm taking you both off the case,' said

Alistair, crisply.

The Doctor's jaw dropped. 'Well! You've never done that before'

'It's the book, Doctor.' Mother seemed to relent somewhat, but only

for a moment. 'We can't afford to have exposés like that flying about

the place'

'It was all lies,' said Mrs Jones.

'Enough of it was true to cause problems. It really isn't on, you

know,'

'Yes,' said the Doctor, 'I see.' He sipped his tea.

They celebrated their sacking by driving to Normandy. The car they

hired wasn't a patch on Mrs Jones's roadster, but it sufficed.

'Smell the air, Mrs Jones,' the Doctor cried.

'Lovely,' she said, and he knew she was as gutted as he was.

The countryside stretched lushly before them, until the hitcher

turned up. He stood arms akimbo in the middle of the road, a white-

haired man in shades and leather jacket.

The Doctor slammed on the brakes.

'That was a rather good stop,' said Mrs Jones.

The hitcher came over to the Doctor's window

'Gee,' he said. 'Fancy seeing you guys out here.'

There was a sudden, urgent hissing then as a noxious green gas

filtered sharply from the dashboard.

'Oh,' said Mrs Jones. 'We should have seen this coming.'

Mother was waiting for a bus.

A particular bus. A bright red London bus, and he was waiting for it

in Paris.

When it came he climbed aboard and peered around at the cramped

but homely interior with interest. He took the drink that Iris offered

him and sank into her sofa.

She was in lime-green silk. A dressing gown.

'Iris,' he said. 'I might have a little job for you.'

'And where are we now, Doctor?'

As he woke he could already tell that Mrs Jones was peeved. Not

content to be alive, to be in possession of all her faculties, she was

actually annoyed at not recognising their whereabouts. When the

Doctor sat up, clutching his head and his hat, he had to admit that he

didn't know either.

Someone had deposited them on a village green. They were boxed

in by buildings in a variety of colours and styles.

'It looks like a proper dog's dinner of a place,' said Mrs Jones.

Above, the sky was the clearest blue. It was as if they had been left

in a place where the weather was always perfect.

The Doctor picked himself up and dusted down his black blazer. 'I

fear, Mrs Jones, that we'll be here for a while.'

About the Authors

PETER ANGHELIDES writes for fun, not for a living. Well, that's the

kind of guy he is: no take, but lots of giving. His writer wife Anne

Summerfield's a constant inspiration. (Their young sons, Sam and

Adam, were a joint collaboration.) He's written for the Beeb before -

*The Listener, Kursaal*, An audio, some TV script appraisals. . er. . that's

all. However, since this short biography's been posted off, he Has

proved, if nothing else, he can't write poetry for toffee.

IAN ATKINS: 29; tall and slim, likes chocolate, music and genre-TV.

Has written TV comedy, music journalism, prize-winning short-stories,

TV series treatments and edited/written *Doctor Who* fan fiction.

Genuine SOH, looking for a long-term relationship with an agent. No

time-wasters please.

CHRISTOPHER BULIS admits to being old enough to have watched

*Doctor Who* live from the very first episode. Since then he has acquired a

degree in architecture and also worked in the fields of art and design

before turning to writing. Unaccountably, he has failed to pursue

careers in the SAS, gold prospecting or white- water rafting, which

traditionally make these biographies much more interesting to read.

Unlike a rather more famous fantasy author, he has never kept

carnivorous plants.

PAUL FARNSWORTH, 29, comes from Derby where he is a retail

bandit on the frontier of the domestic video game trade - or, as some

would have it, a shop assistant. In his spare time he pretends to enjoy

writing. So far, his work has been routinely rejected by some of the best

magazines in the country, and *Private Eye*. The only publication ever to

have accepted one of his submissions folded shortly afterwards, an

achievement which Paul still believes to be his crowning glory.

SIMON FORWARD was born in Penzance in 1967. From the age

of three he was probably dreaming about writing for *Doctor Who*. For a

while he was a computer programmer, but between reading, films, role-

playing and writing, much of his life has been based in fantasy.

Recently, while completing two novels, reality caught up in the shape of

his fiancè, Debbie, two children, two cats and, in the near future, two

weddings. Still a dreamer, he's no longer an insomniac.

PAUL LEONARD has written more *Doctor Who* stuff than is entirely

proper, and sometimes counts TARDISEs in order to go to sleep. He

lives in Bristol with his word processor and several plants, some of

which are trying to turn into triffids. He's hoping one day to write a

'real' novel, but until then will content himself with dreams.

JASON LOBORIK is half-Hungarian and decided to take a break from

editing a *Teletubbies* magazine to write his story. He's big on keep-fit,

organic foods and.. well, actually he's just *big*. However, he protests

that, contrary to popular opinion, he does not resemble Tinky Winky in

the slightest.

STEVE LYONS lives in Salford, and still doesn't regret leaving his job

at a large, well-known bank to become a full-time writer. His published

work includes the best-selling *Red Dwarf* Programme Guide, plenty of

magazine articles and several short stories featuring the Marvel

superheroes. He has written seven *Doctor Who* novels, and is a regular

contributor to the official *Doctor Who Magazine*. When he isn't working,

he reads *Spider-Man* comics and watches *Prisoner: Cell Block H*.

DAVID A. McINTEE was born at a very young age and hasn't died

yet. In between reading *Batman* comics, watching Bond films and

playing *Doom* or *TIE Fighter*, he occasionally cobbles a book together.

He has written, among other things, nine *Doctor Who* novels, with a

tenth to come. He collects weapon props from SF shows/movies, and

his favourite movie is *The Blues Brothers*. David's primary role models in

youth were Tom Baker's *Doctor Who*, Kerr Avon and Graeme

Garden, so members of the public should be wary of approaching him.

PAUL MAGRS was born in the north-east in 1969. He has published

four novels, *Marked for Life*, *Does it Show?*, *Could it be Magic?* and *The Scarlet Empress*, and a collection of stories, *Playing Out*. His next novels



are *Fancy Man*, published by Faber and Faber, and a second *Doctor Who*

novel, *The Blue Angel*. He lectures in English literature and creative

writing at the University of East Anglia.

ANDREW MILLER is, interestingly, a miller, from a long line of milling Millers based in the south of England. He was born in 1967 and

was soon nicknamed 'Windy Miller' after the popular character from

*Camberwick Green* (and for no other reason). After years of putting his

nose to the grindstone (quite appropriately), he has finally had a short

story published. He is married with a child who shares his love of

yachting and watersports.

Although the two stories in this collection break with tradition and

feature characters other than the Seventh Doctor and Ace, ROBERT

PERRY and MIKE TUCKER are currently in the throes of writing

their third story for that particular teaming - *Storm Harvest* - to be

published by BBC Worldwide next June. In their other lives, Robert is

working as a storyliner on *Emmerdale* and Mike is still with the BBC

Effects Unit (just). Whilst Robert can be found racing between London

and Leeds on a regular basis, Mike has been spotted in a number of

West End restaurants in the company of Tara Samms.

GARETH ROBERTS has written several original *Doctor Who* novels

and lots of derivative ones. His favourite Doctor Who is Tom Baker,

his favourite assistant is Romana, his favourite monsters are the

Sontarans. His other favourite old TV programmes are *Blake's 7*, *Emu's*

*Broadcasting Company* and *Man About The House*. He lives in north

London and Leeds and is currently the story editor of Yorkshire TV's

*Emmerdale*. He wishes someone would put *Doctor Who* back on

television on dark Saturday evenings.

GARY RUSSELL has been an actor, *Doctor Who Magazine* editor and is

currently a producer of audio drama. In between all this he has

somehow managed to write seven *Doctor Who* novels, a *Doctor Who* CD-

ROM, some original fiction novels and a handful of factual books

about comedy television programmes. He has a good grasp of the

English language, but claims to have a blindspot over the word

'deadline'.

TARA SAMMS has endured stalkers, talkative dog walkers and odd,

obsessional letters since she last wrote for *Doctor Who*, and is desperate

to set the ball rolling again with her latest story. She is twenty-seven,

enjoys being both behind and in front of the artist's easel, and has been

spotted in a number of West End restaurants in the company of Mike

Tucker.

DAVE STONE. Half man, half ocelot and half award-winning

mathematician, he is a deeply serious person of complete and serious

seriousness, and is not, incidentally, the same man as the comparatively

well-known evangelist from Kentucky - and he's getting a bit tired of

having to point out, to the people who think that he is, that he is in fact

a bisexual Marxist atheist living in London.